

**Proceedings**

**of**

**AuQF2011**

**Demonstrating Quality**

**Melbourne, Australia**

**29 June – 01 July 2011**

## ***AUQA Occasional Publications Series***

AUQA's Occasional Publications (AOP) Series provides a vehicle for the publication of research and reflection on quality assurance and quality enhancement in higher education, with an emphasis on topics of relevance to Australia. The Series includes conference proceedings, themed collections of articles, special issues, reports and monographs. Aims of the Series are to:

- contribute to the enhancement of quality practices and quality assurance in Australian higher education (wherever offered) and internationally
- provide a means for sharing insights, research and analysis that is responsive to identified or emerging needs of quality facilitators in higher education
- stimulate discussion and reflection on directions, evolution and progress in quality improvement relevant to higher education and external quality assurance agencies
- explore the breadth and diversity of approaches to quality assurance in Australian higher education
- provide substantial scholarly contributions to the literature on quality assurance in higher education that would otherwise not be available to a wide audience

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The papers and workshop outlines in these Proceedings have been included as provided to the AuQF organisers. Minimal formatting and editing of grammatical errors has been undertaken but responsibility for the content and style remains with the authors.

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## Preface and Acknowledgements

The 2011 AuQF, held in Melbourne from 29 June – 1 July 2011, was the tenth in a series of annual conferences designed to facilitate the discussion and advancement of quality assurance, quality enhancement and the sharing of good practices in universities and private providers of higher education in Australia and the Australasian region. This was the largest and most diverse AuQF to date, with over 250 participants from ten countries.

The decennial AuQF took place at a turning point in the oversight of higher education quality in Australia. Legislation establishing the new Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) had been passed only a few days before the start of the Forum, with the new regulatory body to come into existence on 31 July, replacing the Forum's longtime sponsor, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA).

This transition was clearly in the minds of participants, and, as the plenary and parallel sessions progressed, took on a sharper focus and resonance. A number of keywords capture the evolving sense of the Forum. The first of these was, inevitably, "*change*", as the potential impact of the coming of TEQSA was explored. Participants heard of imminent "*consolidation*" of regulatory functions under TEQSA and of regulatory frameworks under the new AQF and TEQSA standards. The emergence of a more consolidated but still diverse range of higher education providers, both public and private, hinted at increasing maturation of the sector. "*Engagement*" was another recurrent theme, with keynote speakers variously urging cooperation with the new regime and greater engagement with staff at the chalkface, while presenters in parallel sessions shared examples of the ways in which their institutions were already engaging with the new quality paradigm. Related questions of incentive funding and the future use of peer review were also raised. There was discussion of the widely-acknowledged "*influence*" of Australian higher education quality systems on QA practice internationally; of the positive impact of AUQA audits on institutional performance; and more generally, of the influence of government policy decisions on universities and private providers around the world. Greater transparency of higher education standards, greater openness to market forces and the need for a clear and persuasive narrative to support these were a thread running through the three days of the Forum.

While the Forum program had not been designed to focus on the transition to the new arrangements, its theme of "Demonstrating Quality" in fact provided an excellent framework for so doing. The five keynote speakers contributed international, national and institutional perspectives on the policy changes affecting higher education QA, and the conference heard from some of the key architects and shapers of change in Australia. Many of the 22 papers and five workshops presented in parallel sessions shared the experience of institutions in Australia and overseas in responding to new policy mandates from government. The themes of standards, of the student experience, benchmarking and frameworks for quality were all in play, while the experience of NSAI's was well represented. Two plenary colloquies bookended these themes, with discussants looking back over what has been achieved with respect to demonstrating quality during the AUQA era and reflecting about how quality may be demonstrated in the coming age of TEQSA.

Collectively, the keynote speakers painted an unexpectedly cohesive picture of the changing face of quality assurance in the sector, and in so doing carried the theme of the conference forward. *Dr Steven Crow*, CEO of S.D. Crow & Company and former Executive Director and President of the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, opened the proceedings with a thoughtful presentation on current changes to accreditation policy in the United States. *The Hon. John Dawkins AO* picked up Crow's theme of the ways in which government policy shapes higher education standards in his presentation on the new Australian Qualifications Framework, exhorting Forum participants to join with government in "Partnerships for Quality". His call for acceptance and involvement was echoed by *Dr Carol Nicoll PSM*, CEO of the Australian Learning and Teaching

Council, in a presentation which riffed on the theme of accountability: “Trust us, we’re academics ...” *Professor Jane den Hollander*, Vice Chancellor and President of Deakin University, reminded the Forum of the “people” dimension of accountability for quality at the institutional level in her presentation “Excellence and people: ensuring quality through effective staff engagement.” And, finally, *Professor Denise Bradley AC*, the Interim Chair of TEQSA, brought the keynotes to a close with a “TEQSA Update” in which she stressed the regulatory powers of the new agency.

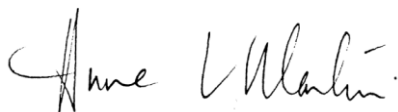
An AuQF highlight has been the recognition of quality practice through the presentation of a number of awards. The Australian Higher Education Quality Award 2011 was presented at the Forum dinner to Professor Emeritus Hilary Winchester. The AuQF2011 Best Paper Award went to Tracey Bretag and colleagues for their paper “Academic Integrity Standards: A Preliminary Analysis of the Academic Integrity Policies at Australian Universities”, which was presented by Julianne East of La Trobe University. Beverley Oliver, an ALTC National Teaching Fellow 2011 and Director of Teaching and Learning at Curtin University, won the Best Presentation Award for a presentation entitled “Assuring Graduate Capabilities: An Approach to Determining and Evidencing Standards”. The AuQF2011 Best Workshop Award went to Ian Kimber, Executive Director of the Queensland Office of Higher Education, and Karen Treloar, AUQA Audit Director, for “TEQSA and Regulation: A Blue Sky Approach”.

One important aspect of conferences such as the AuQF is, of course, social, as they provide an opportunity to catch up with colleagues and build new networks. The Fresher’s breakfast was fully booked out this year, indicating the continued ability of the quality theme to attract new adherents. The Forum also provided opportunities to farewell the Founding Executive Director of AUQA, Dr David Woodhouse, and to welcome his successor, Dr Jeanette Baird.

AuQF2011, like its predecessors, owed much of its success to the work of the Joint Steering Group, a collaborative body responsible for planning and organizing the Forum. Its membership is drawn from across the spectrum of stakeholders of the sector, including the both the universities and the non self-accrediting higher education institutions; Universities Australia; the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors’ Committee; the National Union of Students; the Association for Tertiary Education Management; the Australasian Association for Institutional Research; the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australia; the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; the state and territory Government Accrediting Authorities and the Australian Universities Quality Agency. It was assisted this year by a Melbourne Reference Group, chaired by Nigel Palmer of the University of Melbourne’s Centre for the Study of Higher Education, which undertook the refereeing process for the selection of conference papers and advised on the development of the Forum program.

The 2011 AuQF benefitted from the generous sponsorship of a number of organizations, including the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; IDP Education; Campus Review and Crawford River wines. The Australian Universities Quality Agency underwrote the Forum, as it has since the AuQF’s inception in 2002, and provided its secretariat, together with the services of Claire Gresty, whose work as the AuQF’s Event Manager was central to the Forum’s success.

While the shape of quality assurance in Australian higher education may look very different by the time this publication appears, I believe the 2011 Forum proceedings will remain a useful and stimulating account of where we have come from, and where we hope to go in “demonstrating quality” in higher education in the future.



Dr Anne L Martin  
Joint Steering Group Chairperson, AuQF2011

## **AuQF Joint Steering Group**

The Joint Steering Group (JSG) is responsible for organising the annual Australian Quality Forum. The following is extracted from the JSG's Terms of Reference and Constitution.

### ***Purpose***

The JSG is a collaborative, unincorporated body established to organise annual national fora on the topic of quality and targeted primarily, but not necessarily exclusively, for the Australian higher education sector.

### ***Terms of Reference***

1. The JSG shall be responsible for organising an annual Australian Quality Forum (AuQF) primarily for the Australian higher education sector. The scope may be broadened to include international parties and other post-compulsory education sectors.
2. The purposes of the AuQF shall be to facilitate the discussion and advancement of quality assurance, quality enhancement and the sharing of good practices.
3. The JSG may take responsibility for publishing proceedings of the AuQF or other publications arising from the AuQF.
4. The JSG shall not have final responsibility for managing the financial affairs of each AuQF. The final responsibility shall rest with either AUQA or the host institution or organisation as appropriate. However, the JSG shall advise AUQA or the host institution or organisation in this regard.
5. Any net surpluses from the activities of the JSG shall be applied to the following, in order of priority: (a) to offset any deficits from previous activities of the JSG; (b) to help fund publications arising from AuQFs, and (c) to help fund subsequent AuQFs.
6. The JSG shall have the power to establish subcommittees as necessary to fulfil its terms of reference.

### ***Members at July 2011 (by category)***

(a)	Kay Hemsall, Association of Tertiary Education Managers (ATEM) representative
(b)	Geoffrey Crisp, RMIT University and Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) representative
(c)	Dave Marr, The Australian National University and Australasian Association for Institutional Research (AAIR) representative
(d)	Dr David Woodhouse, Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA)
(e)	Dr Jasen Burgess, Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA)
(f)	Dr Anne Martin, Anne L Martin Consulting (JSG Chair)
(g)	Professor Mark Toleman, University of Southern Queensland
(h)	Nigel Palmer, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne
(i)	Professor Joan Cooper, University of New South Wales and Universities Australia representative
(j)	Dr Charles Sherlock, Australia & New Zealand Association of Theological Schools (ANZATS)
(k)	Greg Deakin, Victorian Registration & Qualifications Authority (VRQA)
(l)	VACANT

(m)	Graham Hastings, National Union of Students
(n)	Dr Maria Fiocco, Curtin College
(o)	VACANT
(p)	Sylvia Schmidt, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
(q)	Dr Joyce Kirk, Tertiary Education Consultant
(r)	Dr Ineke Kranenburg, Universities New Zealand representative

Full details of the JSG Constitution are available at: <http://www.auqa.edu.au/auqf/jsg/constitution.shtml>.



## **Melbourne Reference Group**

### ***Purpose***

The Melbourne Reference Group (MRG) is a committee of the Joint Steering Group (JSG), which has primary oversight of the annual Australian Quality Forum (AuQF). The purpose of the MRG is to assist the JSG in making AuQF a success by providing local expertise and networks.

### ***Terms of Reference***

1. To assist with the promotion of the AuQF2011 through members' local networks.
2. To be involved in the development of the event, including the provision of local advice.
3. To referee proposals and recommend to the JSG a schedule of those proposals to be accepted and declined.

### ***Members at July 2011***

Nigel Palmer (*MRG Chair*), Research Fellow, Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE), University of Melbourne

Tom Aumann, Director, Strategic Policy and Planning, Swinburne University of Technology

Danielle Brown, Policy and Projects Officer, Quality and Equity Unit, Curtin University

Dr Rob Brown, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Institutional Services), Victoria University

Dr Lindsay Heywood, Audit Director, Australian Universities Quality Agency

Dr Julie Jackson, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Educational Partnerships & Quality), La Trobe University

Stephen Nagle, Director, Holmes Institute

Dr Charles Sherlock, Executive Secretary, Australia & New Zealand Association of Theological Schools

Dr Leonard Webster, Audit Director, Australian Universities Quality Agency



## Keynote Addresses

### Demonstrating Quality in Higher Education

**Dr Steven Crow**

*CEO of S.D. Crow & Co, LLC, Oregon, USA*

In 1982 I was an academic concluding a decade-long effort to land a permanent faculty position when I joined the staff of one of the U.S. regional institutional accrediting commissions, the Commission in Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Long name, and in my effort to steer clear of acronyms, I'll just refer to it as The Commission. It happened to be the largest regional agency both in territory covered—nineteen states stretching from the Appalachian to the Rocky Mountains—and in the number of its accredited member institutions, probably around 925 at that time. It also had been accrediting colleges and universities longer than any other regional agency, having extended accreditation to all of its higher education members in 1913. Although I had taught at five colleges and universities during that previous decade, I knew very little about the nature and purposes of accreditation. But I quickly learned that while experience at five institutions had done almost nothing to strengthen my credentials to be a tenured faculty teaching U.S. history, it had introduced me to the administrative cultures of very different types of institutions, excellent preparation for working in an accrediting agency.

1982 is a long time ago. Perhaps fifty years from now an historian of U.S. higher education will place that year near the beginning of major transformations in our colleges and universities, or perhaps nearer a mid-point. What I know is that through my accreditation work of over twenty-six years, I could only conclude that I was caught in a maelstrom of change. In 1982 The Commission had only recently allowed for-profit institutions into its membership, and a tiny place—the University of Phoenix—was one of them. In the mid-80s I was the staff liaison with National Technological University, the first multi-institutional degree-granting experimental virtual institution in the nation. Around forty university engineering schools provided graduate level courses through live satellite delivery to scores of corporate and industrial sites around the nation (and ultimately into Canada and Asia). Within a decade NTU had about a dozen master's programs that enrolled over 1500 students. In 1987 I shadowed one of The Commission's first international evaluation teams as it reviewed the four new European campuses of a small Midwestern Catholic college now named Webster University. Once offering programs only for women, Webster had started in the early 80s to reposition itself to be a co-ed multi-campus global institution. In the mid-80s I attended the very first national conference on assessment of student learning provided by the American Association of Higher Education. And last but not least, in the early 90s, just on the eve of the advent of the Internet, I participated in a brainstorming group wrestling with the challenge finding ways to align cross-border, computer-based distance education with accreditation and state licensure. The host, WCET, has since become a recognized leader in the U.S. in defining best practices in eLearning. During this time, I moved from what was originally a five-year terminal appointment with The Commission to become its Executive Director/President in 1997, a position I held until I retired in June 2008. I tell you all of this because I have decided to talk about “demonstrating quality” through sharing with you my “quality journey”, to appropriate an unfortunate phrase in the lingo of the quality movement.

It might surprise you, but it is fair to say that in the first half of my career at The Commission, we actually shied away from using the word “quality.” The term seemed too hard to define; too many institutions readily appropriated it to market themselves or some aspect of their operations. It struck many in the academic community as a term of corporate America, but not really appropriate to the refined academic

tasks of research, teaching and service. I recall my difficulty in feeling comfortable with the term “quality assurance” as it became the preferred descriptor of the new national bodies in Europe charged with auditing academic programs in a given nation’s colleges and universities. In the U.S., we preferred to see accreditation as accreditation, a process related to meeting specific standards, not vouching for something as amorphous as “quality.” And when we did use the word, we hedged it by placing before it adjectives such as “acceptable” or “appropriate” or “adequate.”

By the turn of the century, however, The Commission had more than made its peace with the word “quality.” It injected it prominently in its new mission statement adopted in 2000: “Serving the common good by assuring and advancing the quality of higher learning.” Within two years, thanks to a \$1.5 million grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Commission rolled out a new accreditation option founded on the quality improvement principles and practices fairly common to business and industry. We called it the Academic Quality Improvement Program or AQIP. However, even as we embraced our commitment to assuring and advancing quality in higher education, we never quite decided what was necessary for a college or university to “demonstrate quality.” Other than meeting standards, that is. As far as I can tell, even today no regional accrediting agency wants to testify that a given university is a “quality” institution or that its academic offerings are “quality programs.”

For a long part of its multi-decade history The Commission’s implicit, if not explicit, understanding of quality had much to do with resources and inputs. That is, an institution’s owned and accrued assets “demonstrated” its quality: the size and credentials of its faculty; the completeness and modernity of its self-contained, full service campus; the numbers of its laboratories and library seats and books; the qualifications and numbers of its administrative staff; and the evidence of its sound fiscal health attested to by external audits, balanced budgets, and, above all, maintenance of reserves or endowments. To be sure, institutional mission defined the nature and mix of the assets that we expected to find, and structures of institutional governance and administration told us whether the institution was capable of exercising effective self-management of these resources. But the assumption was that educational and institutional quality depended to a large extent on the resources an institution brought to bear on fulfilling its particular educational mission.

Even as The Commission—and other similar agencies—moved away from this heavy connection between demonstrating quality and owning inputs, the fact is that most quality assurance in the United States really has not let go of the historic linkage between assets and quality. Read any of the accreditation standards, and you see continued attention on these resources. I thought that through the major revision of its standards in 2003–2005, The Commission made some important pioneering steps toward exploring how “fit for purpose” might replace a set of required inputs. In those new standards we emphasized the importance of clarity of goals, evidence of effective performance, and we placed a laser focus on achieved student learning as a key measurement to “demonstrate quality.” I guess I should not be surprised that the Commission’s current proposed revisions of those standards and requirements touts the fact that it has rediscovered the importance of most of the old input requirements we threw out in 2005 and has placed all or more of them in the new standards. Two steps forward, one backward or *vice versa*.

It’s an understatement to say that I am disappointed. I will be the first to admit that in my leadership of Commission’s efforts to be responsive to new trends in higher education, I may have been altogether too willing to jettison the investments in expected infrastructure of a university in our embrace of student achievement as the new and preferred measure of quality. I may also have been too sanguine about the hidden costs of the reconfigured educational labor sources in several new entities. Perhaps an “unbundled faculty” is really a powerless faculty. I was ready to accept all sorts of alternative configurations of resources and structures as long as the learning achieved by students in those institutions met or exceeded the industry standard. I believed then and still do that excellent teaching and effective learning has escaped the confines of the campus. I think I even coined the cumbersome phrase “deinstitutionalization of learning.” I was ready to accept the reality of shared and contracted-out resources, even those as basic as faculty and learning support services. But as The Commission’s latest proposed revisions to its standards indicates, such thinking does not

seem to be as dominant in accreditation in the United States as I thought it should be. Why don't we in the United States seem to be embracing a new paradigm for demonstrating quality?

### ***The Competing Imperatives in Public Policy***

For many developing nations, investments in higher education are fundamental to the nation's economic development plans. Such clarity of goal is missing in the U.S. Some policy makers decry the diminishing support of the nation's higher education infrastructure; others advocate for new investments in educational innovation. However, increasingly many social commentators and pundits argue that we have erred in linking college credentials to meaningful work and, subsequently, to significant contribution to American society. President Obama calls for colleges and universities to enroll and graduate greater numbers of students while his Department of Education, arguing that it is protecting public funding, seems determined to interfere and undercut new enterprises that could help to meet the President's goals. Although the for-profit sector has been the primary whipping boy in all of this, the Department is making the expansion of eLearning more difficult for every institution in the nation. Moreover, unpredictable DOE activities toward them are turning accrediting agencies into paragons of conservatism. As I will explore somewhat later, most policy makers seem to believe that through the exercise of rigorous systems of accountability, the goal of educating more people to a higher level can be achieved even though they continue to diminish public investments in higher education.

Through their inept presentation of their value to American society, colleges and universities bear some of the responsibility for this state of affairs. As far as I can tell, almost all of their efforts on Capitol Hill have been based on self-protection rather than fueled by any overarching vision of sound higher education policy for the nation. Many colleges and universities seem to have concluded that "demonstrating quality" through these new accountability measures really would be a political exercise with many significant risks. It seems to me that altogether too often, thoughtless public policy makers make such fears appear to be quite well founded.

### ***Quality as the Solution***

Very early in the Commission's transition from counting inputs to weighing outcomes, we quickly let go of any discussion of documenting standardized performance outcomes, emphasizing instead the development and use of quality processes for educational and institutional improvement. In doing so we missed the big shift in the public policy target. Let me provide a brief history to illustrate.

As I mentioned earlier, it was about midway through 1980s that I attended a conference about the value of evaluating and measuring the learning students achieved. A few pioneer institutions told their stories. Some public policy gurus drew attention to many signs of public disgruntlement with higher education. Already some states confronted with budget problems—we were experiencing a recession then as well—demanded heightened accountability from the public sector, particularly for evidence of student learning. One too many stories of college graduates incapable of reading and writing fueled the unhappiness. By the end of the decade, these annual meetings on student assessment drew hundreds, and the federal government imbedded evaluation of student learning outcomes into its regulations for recognizing accrediting agencies for purposes of distributing federal financial aid. Accreditors—certainly my Commission—emphasized that only through assessing student learning could institutional strategies for improving courses and programs be successful. So we required that each institution implement assessment processes, but left to each the definition of adequate student achievement, either in terms of what students learned and the numbers of students who actually completed programs.

Perhaps we didn't miss the target too much at that time, for public policy makers, although they asked for numbers, really seemed to want some evidence that faculties took more responsibility for the learning students achieved. Accreditors tried to make a compelling case that we were being responsive to public policy demands by making assessment of student learning integral to accreditation. All of the regional agencies rewrote standards and in them imbedded assessment of student learning, and many of us started sub-businesses of workshops and assessment academies.

We were not unsuccessful. A recent higher education article said that today assessment of student learning constitutes the largest single issue that requires follow-up after an accreditation evaluation. Another article claims that a recent study shows that large numbers of faculty actually accept and participate in assessment programs. And even as I drafted this talk, I read about the first meeting of the new professionals who manage assessment programs on their campuses. So it appears that we actually made assessment of student learning more than halfway palatable to colleges and universities that initially feared it as an externally set program for accountability. We presented it as a key tool of internal quality improvement, as important to effective self-management as other institutional systems of internal evaluation such as planning and budgeting. Most important, an institution “demonstrated quality” by implementing a rigorous assessment program.

All of this fit amazingly well with the Commission’s highly-publicized experiment in translating corporate and industrial quality improvement principles and practices into an alternative accreditation process. We translated the Department of Commerce’s Malcolm Baldrige Award program to fit the higher education institution before the Award program created its own for higher education. To do this we drew on leaders of state quality agencies—largely focused on business—on management educators committed to the efficacy of quality processes, and on the many community colleges that had already integrated those processes into their basic management systems. In fact, those community colleges helped seed our thinking, for they had already received recognition from various state quality award programs, and they wanted an accreditation program that recognized and valued quality principles and practices. No other agency has duplicated the Commission’s AQIP, but in their last round of revisions, several have integrated explicit quality practices into their standards. In fact, I would argue that growing acceptance of quality assurance principles in university management accounts for the success of accreditation agencies in the U.S. in making assessment of student achievement a stronger, if not yet completely integral, part of organizational culture in our colleges and universities.

Please note that an AQIP institution demonstrates quality not by meeting externally set performance expectation (unless it makes those expectations its own), but by learning through its quality processes how to identify improvements needed to achieve the goals it sets for itself. I will say for AQIP that unlike most accreditation in the U.S., it emphasizes transparency, information sharing, and benchmarking as fundamental to effective quality processes.

But during all of this work on quality, the public policy expectations had shifted, or so I think, from wanting evidence that colleges and universities actually strive to strengthen the learning of students to demanding evidence that they did so for larger numbers of students who actually completed degrees. In short, expectations for “demonstrating quality” moved from achieved learning to increased productivity.

### ***Quality as Performance***

Public policy makers in the United States—and I venture to say, almost everywhere else—seem to be tired of hearing about inputs and even the effective implementation of quality processes. Demonstrating quality appears to rest with giving hard data on performance. They argue that colleges and universities should be able either to provide a fairly simple set of externally set performance indicators or to fill in the blanks on a standardized performance matrix. Colleges and universities should do this not simply to inform their own improvement agendas, but to assure the public that the public money invested in them is well spent. And to assure students that their investment—and debt—is in a place that actually demonstrates quality. I assume this pressure is the same everywhere, although probably marked by different themes and emphases in every nation. I only observe that in the United States, the cry for measurement against externally set performance goals seems to rise almost proportionally to the declining investment in higher education as a percentage of total government expenditures. But in the U.S., the handwringing policy makers justify their strident complaints and increasing demands for performance information on our diminishing ranking in a series of global competitiveness measures.

To us performance has two related but very different faces: productivity and efficiency. Productivity holds that institutional quality is to some extent measured by how easily students move through the pipeline, and it revolves largely around degree and program completion rates. Folks that emphasize productivity want to see institutions and their faculties focus less on research and more on teaching and providing interventionist strategies that help students succeed. Efficiency holds that institutions should be able to achieve greater productivity without significant increase in cost. Advocates of efficiency expect to see heavy integration of new technologies, recasting of the traditional classroom, cutting low enrollment courses and programs, and restructuring of the basic labor system by bowing less to systems of tenure and promotion and limiting the role of unions and collective bargaining. We are currently having a love-hate relationship with the for-profit sector, for although many believe that no one should profit from providing good higher education, many admire the efficiencies gained in some of our highly visible for-profit operations. The scaling institution is undoubtedly fundamental to ultimate efficiency in higher education, but as far as I can tell, too many people, educators and policy makers alike, hold as a basic premise that scaling is antithetical to quality.

For almost all of the last century, leaders of U.S. colleges and universities doubted that “demonstrating quality” through performance measures was either wise or healthy. Basically they said repeatedly that it just was not possible. The specters of national standards, of standardized testing, of misunderstood and misused comparative data haunted them, and continue to. Their arguments become more and more alarmist and shrill whenever it appears that one way or another the federal government might require this approach to demonstrating quality. Through its regulations, the federal government actually already requires the national accrediting agencies it recognizes, many of which accredit for-profit institutions, to implement such measurements. But when such requirements were proposed for regional institutional agencies, the higher education lobbyists flew to the defense of institutional autonomy as the absolute necessity for genuine academic quality.

Australian quality assurance appears to assume that benchmarking is a valuable tool, and privately U.S. institutions do a lot of it. But the major fights of the last four years over federal policy has revolved to a significant degree around any external definitions of performance goals that might translate into comparisons. Our very large independent sector—the large majority of which are not-for-profit—leads the fight.

The issue remains a very live wire. Various groupings of colleges and universities have agreed to demonstrate quality by participating in voluntary programs that include web publication of some common data elements related to academic performance. The massive community college community is just now piloting its own web-based disclosure mechanism. The independent sector eschews any common definitions for performance claiming that it hears few calls from its constituents for such data. Nonetheless, even it encourages voluntary participation in its web-based presentations aimed at the public in general and prospective students in particular. As far as I can tell, research universities tend to think that all of this demand for performance data primarily on student achievement must be about everyone else in the business, but not them.

And where are the regional accrediting commissions in all of this? Essentially encouraging participation in these new voluntary systems and deferring to national higher education associations that are determined to fight any movement for accrediting agencies to establish productivity measures that enable public benchmarking of performance, whether about productivity or efficiency.

### ***Higher Education Quality as a National/International Enterprise***

Let me conclude by telling you that as I worked on these comments, I came to doubt that you have much to learn from the telling of my “quality journey.” I am sure you might recognize yourselves in some aspects of it, but I think there are some fundamental differences in Australian and U.S. higher education. While continuing to be strong advocates for the university’s unfettered control of its own intellectual life,

Australians appear to be willing to see the strengthening of quality in higher education as an appropriate shared national goal, particularly as higher education becomes a globalized enterprise.

In the U.S. it is almost a required religious exercise to praise the amazing diversity of colleges and universities that exist there. The basic tenet of our higher education faith, therefore, is that quality flourishes best in decentralized and relatively unregulated environments that provide students with a myriad of options. The fact is that higher education in the U.S.—public, private, and for-profit—is highly regulated but much less on matters related to educational quality than on matters of business operations, safety, consumer protection, and equity and non-discrimination. In fact, over the past few years, the higher education community has shouldered more and more regulation even as it fought to prevent any national performance numbers that would “demonstrate quality.”

Nothing engenders the opposition of higher education leaders faster than any perceived threats of nationalization and standardization. Many other nations in the world, including Australia, appear to have found ways to create and put into policy a broad national consensus on hallmarks of educational quality, particularly by adopting national “qualifications frameworks.” It is hard if not impossible to reach such consensus in a nation that makes diversity in higher education an item of faith, and in a nation where the Constitution fails to include education as matter of national policy. No governmental or non-governmental agency is empowered to create consensus. I rush to note as well that the virulent partisanship rampant throughout the United States today almost immediately translates almost any debate over quality in higher education into a partisan fight.

Although high education leaders bemoan the expensive confusion of the U.S. “system”, the higher education communities play the virulent partisanship as a way of protecting autonomy. So, too, do the multiple quality assurance agencies as they defend their separateness even in the face of a growing need for stronger national coordination of their work. It should not be surprising that now, as in the past, major philanthropic foundations seem willing to invest millions of dollars to create a new national consensus and enable stronger national coordination. It worked a century ago, but only time will tell whether it will work now.

My sense is that higher education in the United States will “demonstrate quality” to some extent by grudgingly providing numbers, by being slightly more transparent, and by accepting public responsibility to be more accountable. I don’t know whether quality assurance agencies or governmental regulation or enlightened leadership will play the most prominent role in bringing this about. But I am confident that U.S. policy makers and educators alike have much to learn from watching other nations, including Australia, create ways to strengthen higher education quality within a nation without abridging the university’s fundamental commitments to academic freedom and academic integrity. Perhaps the recent series on Australian higher education in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* points to a new openness to learn from the experiences of others. I am confident of one thing: many educators and policy makers around the world are observing changes in Australian higher education and its higher education quality assurance with great interest.

In his opening comments to the Auditor Meeting this morning, David Woodhouse noted several of the challenges ahead in transitioning from AQUA to TESCA. I thought I heard him say that all the bright, experienced, and committed people in the room needed to contribute to the formation and implementation of TESCA so that this new untested national program of quality assurance might be a model of enlightened higher education quality assurance in a 21st century nation. Heaven knows whether the U.S. will ever have the opportunity to consider, let alone become such a model. So you owe it to yourselves and to nations around the world to make this thing work, and I wish you the best in your endeavors.



## Excellence and People: Ensuring Quality Through Effective Staff Engagement

Professor Jane den Hollander

*Vice-Chancellor, Deakin University, Australia*

I begin by acknowledging the Wurrundgeri people of the Kulin nations, the traditional custodians of the land on which we are gathered. We pay our respects to them for their care of the land.

Good morning and thank you to the forum organisers for the invitation and opportunity to be able to speak with you this morning. I particularly note the AUQA staff and directors, also my colleagues from Deakin and a fond hullo to old friends at Curtin.

As you can see in the program, the topic submitted to the AuQF organisers for the conference program is “Excellence and people: ensuring quality through effective staff engagement”. However, more correctly my topic subtitle is *“Engaging staff in ensuring quality – how not to bore everyone to death!” This is probably the secret to success but more of that later.*

Deakin has just completed its second AUQA audit. The euphoria of successfully navigating the complex web of portfolio, overseas visits and then the sheer number of staff in the right place at the right time is over and replaced by that low key twilight zone of anxiety as one awaits the draft report. What will they *actually* say, and more importantly, write?

This Deakin audit was my second cycle 2 audit – careless some might say – I was at Curtin before this and was part of both of their AUQA audits. So I am an expert on the emotional rollercoaster of quality assurance and quality management and the challenge of the leadership involved in attempting to take staff to the top of the mountain.

We all know that the journey to a successful external validation of what you do is more helpful than the actual report itself. So I am going to talk a bit about my views on how *to do quality*, and I use those words advisedly, and will come back to them later ... What I am going to say this morning is based on my experience at Curtin during its two audits – one as an astonished new staff member in 2001 – the UK was never like this – and then as the accountable officer, a DVC A, in 2009 and, now over this past year as the leader at Deakin. I hope this will be interesting for you.

For me it all starts with the **reason we all work in universities**. Universities are part of a great global endeavour. When I ask staff what we do as an institution they mostly say “We enrol, assess and graduate students. But that’s HOW we do what we do; it’s not WHY we “do” it. We actually contribute to a much greater endeavour, we aspire to provide people with a more informed world view and by so doing enable the creation of new knowledge. I think what we aspire to do is encapsulated in the UN *Millennial Development Goals* endorsed by just about everyone from the UN outwards and owned in Australia by the Australian Government. I took the following from the DFAT/AUSAID website and, to remind you, the eight goals are:

1. Eradicate extreme hunger and poverty
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health

6. Combat HIV/Aids, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

Impressive by any yardstick. These Millennial Development Goals are agreed by all of the World's leading institutions (that includes us) and it is expected to have a Report Card and quality review in 2015. All of the world's developing countries have given unequivocal support.

I could have put up the mission, vision and goals of Deakin or Curtin or indeed any of the institutions represented here today and mapped to these goals quite easily. So my first point is that excellence and staff engagement to ensure Quality begins with a clear narrative for why you/we/the institution exists and why we get out of bed in the morning. Quality and excellence need a narrative else why bother? In the absence of clear goals *near enough is good enough* surely? This is especially true when we are dealing with clever people who are often completely and in-utterably focussed on one small but important aspect of one of those Millennial Development goals and are not interested in the needs of their current institution, and certainly not of VCs, DVCs, or Directors of Quality. In my experience if you provide the narrative and link what you want to **what** they do, and don't lecture them about **HOW they do it**, we will grow to excellence and your staff will take you there. I could now give you a list of the leading innovations and companies in the world where this has been at the basis of their success – Apple, Google spring to mind - but I would prefer to focus on what we do – the vast majority of people in this room – because what we do is important.

As any of you will know, especially those who have been involved in managing an AUQA audit, effective staff engagement is vital but it must be as part of an agreed framework that links the **why** (aspiring to a great goal) to the **how** and the **what**. You also definitely have to ensure you don't bore everyone to death by going direct to the how and the what and leaving out the why ...

That means linking the grand vision and goals (the MDGs) to our purpose/mission which is the creation and transfer of knowledge to create a better world. These two activities, more commonly labelled research and teaching, sit at the heart of our higher education purpose. We enrol, examine and graduate students to achieve this purpose. Everyone gets that and that's what I learnt through three audits. Don't tell your people what to do or, worse, how to do it, tell them why they exist and why that existence is central to the fulfilling of the MDGs, your University mission, their next research grant.

But surprisingly, in the many quality events that I have endured over the years the grand purpose is rarely enunciated. The chase is immediately to within a pixel of the last bit of policy or procedure that needs review or tweaking – it is thus out of context, its mechanistic, it is disconnected and you know what they, your staff and colleagues are thinking: *Go Away, we do this stuff every year with monotonous regularity. Oh and by the way we are really busy and you are wasting all our money with this ridiculous audit thing whereas I am educating students who will reduce child poverty or invent a cheap vaccine to cure of HIV/AIDS in Africa ...* Or thoughts to that effect.

Whatever you do, create the link to the future. My best example at the moment is one of our Professors, at our Warrnambool campus, who is part of an Aquaculture project and he looks for ways to farm fish and how to preserve wild fish stocks in the ocean to eradicate poverty and give children Omega 3s ... he does not actually do Aquaculture, he is abolishing child poverty – there is a difference and I won't labour the point further.

But of course getting staff engaged is just the beginning, but it's an important beginning and if you get it right things will go well and there is sufficient evidence in the world to validate that ... But there are lots of stops and starts along the way, regular tears before bedtime can be the norm, and so I am going to use

two examples to describe some of the pitfalls I have experienced in the getting of a quality management approach that provided results.

Firstly, *eVALUate*: This is an online process to record and report on student satisfaction with their units. It was developed at Curtin. *eVALUate* has received many awards for the team, the one I liked best of course (a DVC A to my bootstraps) was the commendation in the Curtin Cycle 2 audit. I thus acknowledge Beverley Oliver, Sue Jones, Bea Tucker and any other *eVALUate* team members in the room for their work and their demonstration of excellence in engaging staff in probably a defining change project at Curtin – much of its current success and innovation in teaching and learning began with *eVALUate*.

This project was an example of significant engagement at the beginning. The Project was well planned within an inch of its existence, every aspect of the survey was validated and tested, and everyone agreed that rigour, critical analysis was in place. The consultation included the Union reps in all meetings from day one. Here *the WHY are we doing this* was very clearly enunciated and everyone got it.

The University, through its Academic Board, agreed this was important albeit very threatening and as I recall one member saying words to the effect *this is striking at the heart of what academic staff do*. The project rolled out as a very big trial and the students engaged in pleasing numbers. And then we hit THE issue. Students actually said what their experience was, they also made lots of comments and given we had not ever asked them before there were lots, some not so complimentary. This upset staff. The Union took a dispute – I won't go into the details of why, suffice to say it happened. In the end it boiled down to one thing: was teaching a private matter over which the staff member had rights or was it part of the public good and the university had an obligation to ensure the quality and make improvements as needed.

It took a lot of hard work to resolve this. So ... we had done the right things: Developed an idea, linked it to the Curtin vision and mission, engaged staff at the beginning and then a brick wall of dispute and the Commission. Looking back we got through this bit *because the beginning engagement had been right and staff got it and supported it*. What surprises me to this day and that I didn't pick it at all: the idea was good, the planning was good, the staff managing were stunningly good. But I forgot that people have feelings especially when comments are about their core business – teaching. Students can sometime be brutal and while there were only handfuls of horrid remarks it was sufficient for everyone to say *"something must be done"*. The team fixed it of course, going slow, working through every issue with every staff member and there are now protocols for everyone on how to give feedback etc. But it was a close run thing, and the line between success and disaster is often a fine one. So my second point on ensuring excellence through staff engagement is to hasten slowly. My third point is time on task: to have a clever, knowledgeable team who are focussed on the issue as their job, not as well as their normal job. Time on task works every time. If the project is important, and quality matters then make sure you have the staff to ensure that it has an outcome. Things go wrong – the law of nature is that things descend to chaos – and that is not the issue. The issue is having the capacity to react, to be resilient in doing so and to look for the solutions from the affected staff.

In the case of *eVALUate* history shows they published it all, won a commendation in the Audit and staff now use their *eVALUate* data for promotions, to improve their unit the next semester and for their own personal learning and testing of new ideas. Excellence through staff engagement.

My second example is the Introduction of the **Trimester calendar** at Deakin.

Deakin was the first public university to introduce a trimester across four campuses, 39,000 students and about 3000 staff were affected, across most disciplines. We are into our fourth 'real' year and now sailing in more pleasant waters but the journey to an outcome has been rocky.

The Trimester is a case study where staff engagement was not optimised at the beginning. There was a brief plan on how to do it, but little narrative on what, and certainly no debate about why you would do this. My take, one year into the job is that it was actually a brilliant idea, neatly aligned with the kind of university Deakin is and wishes to become in this next decade. In retrospect it has been easy to provide the narrative but it's been up the hill of disengagement and that is hard.

In essence a brief paper was taken to Academic Board, talked about in broad terms and then implemented as a short project. As the implementation began and people looked at the detail – ahh the detail I hear you all think – all hell broke out. Staff disengaged completely. Staff and students discovered that Study week was reduced to 3 days! The turnaround on exams was very tight. Some students had three exams in one day. Everyone got cross. Not good outcomes and a signal that the change might fail.

What saved the university from a difficult situation, in my opinion and looking at the facts now, was the culture that had been growing around teaching and learning surprisingly. A prior investment in quality and rewarding innovative approaches to quality began to pay off big time.

My fourth point: You Must INVEST in QUALITY as a process and as a culture. This won't stop some things going wrong but it may save you from crashing into the abyss.

Deakin's Strategic Teaching and Learning Grant Scheme (STALGS) was introduced in 2004 and has been operating since to support projects that have strategic value in meeting the University's goals and advancing the strategies and actions in the Teaching and Learning Plan.

The scheme has a substantial annual budget with the maximum for any single project being around \$50k. The application process has mirrored the one used by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council programs, therefore providing Deakin staff with experience in how to develop a proposal and make clear their objectives, aims and intended outcomes. A final report must be submitted by the project leader within one month of the completion of the project and it is expected that each project would produce at least one refereed journal publication. The crucial link to scholarship that underpins all we do.

This has been a multi-million dollar investment in teaching and learning innovation. Good practices emanating from Strategic TAL Grant Scheme projects and other sources are disseminated through the annual Deakin Teaching and Learning Conference. Over 900 staff members have attended the conference since its inception in 2005.

Alongside this Deakin's Teaching Performance Incentive Fund (TPIF) provides funding annually for allocation across the University on a competitive basis according to each faculty's relative performance on a set of agreed input and output measures. The aim of the TPIF has been to help to drive a culture of innovation and excellence in teaching and learning at Deakin University and there is little doubt that its existence has strengthened the awareness of the importance of teaching and learning within the institution.

The TPIF is recognised by teaching academics as a key mechanism for supporting improvement in policy and practice.

So while staff were wholeheartedly cheesed off by the Trimester there were mechanisms to use to enable the smaller projects with the grand plan to be picked off and things were fixed, change and generally a view emerged. What helped was that students, often forgotten in these big change agendas, liked the trimester. They could go faster – great for Internationals on an expensive dollar exchange; they could go slower and work and be HECS free at the end of their degree and it not take that much more time.

I reviewed the Trimester implementation when I got to Deakin as we had agreed to do that as part of our EA. Everyone had their say. Most agreed, now, that there was merit but they were still 'bloody annoyed'. To balance that a part time mature aged woman student wrote to me very eloquently about her experience – two kids, low pay. She used the trimester, went a bit slower but will finish her degree shortly in four years and kept the debt down – part time and done in 4 years! Amazing! She says Deakin changed her life and will change the life and future prospects of her children. We got the narrative of why we should do the Trimester from our students.

Everyone gets this story. If we had bothered at the beginning we could have avoided the drama.

The evidence is today compelling: STALGS and TPIF and staff hard work has paid off. The continuing increases in SETU scores in the University over the last three years demonstrate the enhancement of teaching and learning and the satisfaction with the student experience. The recent 2010 CEQ data has Deakin ranked 1 in this State for overall student satisfaction. An outstanding outcome, that in 2008, might have looked wishful at best.

My fifth point is change is essential to ensure excellence and quality and it may well be painful. What we need to avoid is doing it so hard! Staff engagement is an essential ingredient in everything that matters – without it excellence is hard to come by and you risk staff closing you down and out.

My sixth point in "Excellence and people: ensuring quality through effective staff engagement" and I hope I have not sent you all to sleep ... is about working within a national framework.

There is no doubt for me that my attention to ensuring I understand where we are excellent and where we are not has been assisted mightily by two pieces of framework infrastructure.

Firstly the Australian Qualifications Framework, The AQF, is refreshed and while we might grumble about bits of it and how they got there and why they did not consult more and will it keep us at the forefront and enable evolution etc., it has provided us with a structure for what we do in relation to our awards. It's a very important part of the quality assurance of Brand Australia and as we all know this Framework is increasingly recognised internationally for its rigour and architecture.

AUQA is that other part of the Framework. The AUQA has had a profound impact on all of our institutions, and for the good. Even those who assure us publicly that it's an expensive exercise in rubber stamping conceded privately that much is achieved through the preparation and journey to the visit and final report. It's been a love/hate relationship. WE hate AUQA and all its directors in the weeks building to a portfolio submission. WE really loathe them as we grind through the ordeal of getting people to the right room at the right time for a meeting with the panel. And then the love breaks out in bucket fulls once those parts of the institution receive a commendation for excellence and bask in the glory and remind everyone they have always been a supporter.

Of course AUQA is dead and its long live TEQSA. We move to from audit to formal regulation with Commissioners and a set of legislation that the sector has defined and influenced and which should serve us well, albeit we must always stay alert to the barbarians who may have views not aligned to the grand purpose of what we do. But I would like to end by acknowledging the work that AUQA has done – in tone, in style and sheer bloody persistence they have provided a robust framework, grounded in scholarship, benchmarked and now, at the end of their era AUQA is a benchmark for other jurisdictions to aspire to.

They focussed us on standards, on closing the loop, on English language proficiency, on consistency, on doing what our policy says we should be doing. Everyone now knows what a quality management and

assurance framework is. We did not ten years ago. They did all this through engagement with the sector, often on difficult and unpopular issues, with resilience and courage.

So my final point is – one of the exemplars of how to ensure quality through effective staff engagement is AUQA. Look at what they have achieved and how they have done it and learn.

It is a universal truth that if you do not aspire to excellence you have nothing.  
So Do Quality ... it is the only thing that matters.

## Trust Us, We're Academics ...

**Dr Carol Nicoll**

*CEO, Australian Learning and Teaching Council, Australia*

Over recent years I have been asked by academics on numerous occasions – why is the government picking on universities; why are academics targeted for such unfair attention. The Foucauldians amongst you, ask why is the government increasing their surveillance of us and our institutions? Put simply, why doesn't the government trust us?

These concerns, and in some cases an escalating paranoia about government policy changes, are sincere and heartfelt – many in the academic community really don't understand why they are not trusted by governments and arguably the general community. Many academics believe it should be enough to say to the world as they have done over many generations – trust us, we're academics, we're experts in what we do, you can trust us to get on with our job and deliver appropriate outcomes. So please leave us alone.

But the world has changed. You cannot and will not be left alone. This is not a targeted vendetta against universities, higher education institutions or academics, but part of a broader move towards greater accountability in a range of what are perceived as 'public spheres of life'. To understand these changes is to understand current higher education policy. It is to understand the context in which TEQSA has been created and how TEQSA and the principles of operation that will underpin it are a clear evolution from AUQA rather than some revolutionary shift in expectations of the higher education sector.

We live in a very different world from that recently described by Louis Menand in a very interesting New Yorker article (*The New Yorker*, June 6, 2011, p.74). In this piece, he tracks his progress from his first job in an Ivy League university. He writes of that job and that era – “*None of us [students or teachers] ever questioned the importance of what we were doing.*” He felt that students at that time were “*earnestly and unproblematically engaged with the academic experience*”. But he then goes on to reflect on his experience some years later in a public university when “*students were asking me to justify the return on investment in a college education. I just had never been called upon to think about this before. It wasn't part of my training. We took the value of the business we were in for granted.*” I'm afraid that none of you can take teaching and learning for granted or for that matter any aspect of the higher education enterprise.

'Trust' in the sense that I am going to speak of it today is more than being trustworthy or being trusted to tell the truth. But there is some evidence that trust in this important sense, is still something that academics generally enjoy. There is something called the Edelman Trust Barometer which surveys communities around the world on the level of trust they have in issues, ideas and institutions, including governments. In the 2011 Trust survey they found that of the Australians surveyed in relation to this question – *if you heard information about a company from a range of sources, including the CEO, government officials, or people like yourself* – 69% believed that academic experts were the most credible source of authority and information. I suspect that even this will change over time as we see expertise questioned in a range of contexts, for example, as we've seen where ordinary people increasingly question their doctors about advice after they have undertaken their own research and subsequent self-diagnosis via the internet.

Successive Morgan Polls in Australia on perceptions of the image of particular professions or occupations have consistently rated university lecturers in the top ten professions, up there with nurses, teachers,

doctors, recognised as having perceived high levels of honesty and ethics. In contrast, politicians, journalists, union leaders and estate agents consistently hit the bottom of the list.

So Australians still appear to trust that academics will tell the truth. Although even that trust lives in the shadow of media reports of associations between researchers and big business, and questions about the independence of academics whose research is funded by particular corporations with an apparent vested interest in particular outcomes.

I think also that the concept of trusting an academic as an expert is about trust in an individual rather than trust in an institution, even an educational institution. There has been some interesting work by the Mori Social Research Institute in the UK into trust in public institutions (*Trust in Public Institutions*, MORI Social Research Institute). They found that people make a clear distinction between trust in individuals working for an organisation and the organisation as a whole – they tend to trust the individual but are suspicious of the institution.

But there is another way of looking at trust, beyond telling the truth. It is a notion of trust that relates to delivery of a service – in the case of higher education institutions, an educational service. It is a trust that is about the level of confidence that government or the general public has in the outcomes of that service and how you may provide or deliver that service and the expected or anticipated outcomes of that service.

The international education sector has recently experienced what some have described as a ‘perfect storm’ of challenges. Let me coin a slightly less evocative but equally non-technical term for what I think has happened to higher education in relation to accountability – I believe higher education has experienced a ‘double whammy’. This has occurred as two types of related accountability have ‘hit’ the higher education sector with considerable force and impact.

Most developed nations are experiencing a wave of activity and interest in greater **public sector accountability**. At the same time as being subject to public sector accountability, higher education institutions are subject to rising expectations from students, parents of students and employers – which could be described as **public accountability**.

So, what we are seeing in Australia, is a pressure for increased accountability from the higher education sector, from both government, which in the Australian context remains the major funder of higher education; and students, parents and employers, who as significant users or ultimate consumers of the educational service and its outcomes, are also crying out for more accountability from academics and institutions.

Today I am going to focus mainly on public sector accountability, but clearly the two areas are interrelated. Indeed governments are very quick to latch on to any demands from the public for accountability from higher education institutions, to further justify their own interest in higher education institutions’ performance. What do I mean by accountability? It is a concept whose definition and intent are often contested. So let me lay out a conception of a notion of accountability that is framed around four elements:

1. There is someone identified as being responsible when things go wrong – that is, there is **someone to blame**.
2. That there is **public and ready access to evidence of mistakes or problems** – this generally means availability of reliable and valid information or data about performance. Stakeholders need to have confidence that there is no chance that problematic trends are covered up or ignored because public data will reveal the problems. This is what underpins the calls for greater transparency in the operation of all public services – whether they are in health, aged care, social services or higher education.



3. That whoever is identified or perceived as being the responsible party, **acknowledges and owns the problem** rather than attempting to cover it up or dismissing it as someone else's problem.
4. And finally that there is **a process in place that will be followed to address problems** or mistakes – so that outsiders/stakeholders can have some confidence that it won't happen again.

This is perhaps an overly simplistic deconstruction of accountability – but I think it is what government and the public seek.

In recent years calls for greater public sector accountability have focused on primarily economic accountability. This is perhaps not surprising given what the world has experienced over the past four years. The community, led, if not at times provoked by the media, has called on governments to manage public finances through **major economic crises** – the Global Financial Crisis; through **natural disasters** – the floods in Queensland, the earthquakes in NZ and Japan; but also to address **longer term expectations and emerging problems**, such as an ageing population, with increased need for greater expenditure on health and aged care. The challenges of balancing all of these competing priorities put an extraordinary pressure on national budgets and public policy decisions. The budget constraints will not disappear. We will be living with these sorts of budget conditions for many years to come.

So national governments are looking to make savings and seek efficiencies from all areas that currently receive public funding. The demise of the ALTC is a fine example of a victim of such savings measures. The funding cuts in the United Kingdom to higher education are another example. Governments are being forced to prioritise funding in ways that challenge accepted safe and secure havens of previous expenditure – there is no area of funding which is safe. I am not going to speak about the value propositions of what governments cut and what they continue to fund (although clearly I have a personal view on that!). It is enough that I describe that this is an extreme and continuing pressure point.

We have to acknowledge that Australia's universities receive considerable funding from the Commonwealth. They receive direct funding from base, targeted and competitive funding programs. They receive further funding through Government subsidies to the student loans programs, HELP. Given the context which I describe, this funding is under constant scrutiny from those who must look for savings and reductions in public expenditure. Key to making the case for continued and indeed, increased funding for higher education are evidence, data, information, that validate Government decisions to continue expenditure.

So, funding is the primary hook on which the Commonwealth seeks accountability from higher education institutions. In answer to those of you who question scrutiny or accountability I would ask – why should higher education institutions be exempt from the level of scrutiny that any other recipient of public funds is subject to?

There is of course a personal element in judgements about accountability and trust. I suspect that higher education institutions suffer from being tarred with the same brush as the public service and public servants generally – the perception that compared with the private sector, the public sector is inefficient, wasteful and those who work in it have an easy life without any real pressures. Myths about academics' working hours or waste in universities will only be dispelled if there is more information available to counter such preconceptions. I think that the higher education sector needs to be sufficiently open and transparent about its operation to be able to dispel these sorts of misplaced generalisations.

The people evaluating any Commonwealth funding decisions and advising the Government on what to fund and what not (the Department of Finance and Deregulation), do so using three criteria – appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency.

They are looking to:

1. Assess the continued relevance and priority of program objectives in the light of current circumstances, including government policy changes (i.e. **appropriateness** of the program);
2. Test whether the program outcomes achieve stated objectives (i.e. **effectiveness**); and
3. Ascertain whether there are better ways of achieving these objectives (i.e. **efficiency**).

Without evidence of these things, any area of Commonwealth funding is vulnerable and open to serious challenge. Higher education institutions are not removed from this scrutiny. All funding to higher education must continue to meet these requirements. And I think it is vital that the sector recognises this. In meeting these requirements, the sector will also go some way to building a different profile of itself in the minds of the general public.

There has been a significant change in the way governments, including the Australian government, frame the performance of programs or funding recipients.

Since the Labor Government came to power more than four years ago there has been a major change in intergovernmental financial arrangements between the Commonwealth and States and Territories. There are real similarities between these changes and the evolution of accountability in the higher education sector.

The new intergovernmental financial arrangements between Commonwealth and States and Territories are borne out in the negotiation of the special purpose payments in a range of areas, including in schools (National Education Agreement) and vocational education and training. In those agreements there has been a conscious move away from reporting on inputs to a reporting on outcomes and in some cases outputs. This move signalled an acknowledgement that the real goal of funding was to achieve and in most cases improve outcomes. And in moving from an obsession with measuring the inputs, the Commonwealth has attempted to stay out of the micro-management of all levels of service delivery, leaving the States and Territories to achieve the outcomes that have been agreed through prior negotiation.

So, just as public sector accountability has evolved over the past 10 years, to get to the point now where the focus is on outcomes, so has the nature of the accountability expected from the higher education sector. It is a move from an inputs focus (accounting for expenditure, has it been spent as it was said to have been spent?) to an outputs, outcomes and results or performance focus.

In the same way that the Commonwealth has evolved its position in relation to accountability by the states and territories, the Commonwealth knows that universities and higher education institutions are best able to deliver the teaching and learning or research experience – they don't want to interfere in how they do those core tasks – service delivery is best achieved by the institutions. But there is a trade off in this move from inputs to outcomes. It is that there must be a sufficient number of indicators of outcomes, which are appropriately defined.

As you all know, this significant shift in accountability expectations is not without its risks and its challenges. There is not just one conundrum in a move to an outcomes focus for accountability in higher education, I believe there are several. I will only address a selection.

Firstly, is the problem that there is **not necessarily consensus on the end destination of a higher education** – i.e. **the outcomes may be contested**. As highlighted by the piece in the New Yorker, academics have generally operated by assumed, implicitly understood outcomes, but not necessarily articulated these in any public way. The challenges of both the Tuning process in Europe and closer to home, the ALTC Learning and Teaching Academic Standards project have been real, as both projects

have sought to reach a settlement, a shared understanding, nationally or across Europe, as to the desired learning outcomes for graduates in particular fields of study. That is, they have sought to identify explicit statements of learning outcomes from higher education.

This is not an easy settlement to achieve but the LTAS project has shown that Australian academics across the nine fields of study we have taken on, are willing and eager to do the hard work to identify such learning outcomes. But it takes time, extensive consultation and collaboration, if it is not just going to be a token effort arrived at by a small committee. But LTAS has shown that it is possible.

The second problem is a cluster of issues relating to the **intrinsic validity of an outcomes approach** in education. These issues arise in part because of the nature of education. It is an acknowledgement that higher education institutions are responsible for producing graduate outcomes in environments and under conditions which are qualitatively different from the places that are responsible for the efficient and effective manufacture of pineapple pieces or an automobile. Universities and other higher education institutions are not and should not become factories.

Do we have enough information about the outcomes of learning to be able to fairly and validly monitor performance? Is it fair or indeed valid to aggregate outcomes across courses of study or institutions, which are essentially individualised in their achievement? Is there enough causality between the outcomes of higher education and the service delivery by the higher education institution or do other factors, such as environmental factors, confound the achievement of outcomes to such an extent that they can't validly be identified or used? And if you can't directly measure the outcomes of higher education in a way that everyone can agree on, are there acceptable proxies that can be accepted? And what is the best time to measure an outcome from higher education – is it the immediate outcome (near or at the time of graduation), or medium term (five years after graduation) or long term. And finally how do we measure outcomes in a meaningful way for individuals as well as courses or institutions?

One of the blessings and curses for measuring outcomes has been the impact of technology. Innovations in technology have enabled collection of data in ways that were once impossible. Technology also enables tracking of performance in new ways, but the problem remains to get the indicators of that performance right. There is a risk that whilst technology may enable access to new domains and sources of data – it may also be used to measure things which aren't really relevant or valid as indicators of performance. It is too easy for the mere captivating capacity of the technology to measure something, being allowed to drive the adoption rather than the validity of the indicator.

We are also not very good at finding the time to sort the necessary from the unnecessary in our data collections. In a recent survey by IBM Global Business Services, they found that public sector analytics professionals spend 47% of their time collecting and organising data and less than a third of their time on sophisticated analysis of their data. There is a risk that we face what some people describe as the 'data paradox' – too much data, too little insight from the data. The obsession with collection needs to move to a stage where we prioritise what we really need, what is important, then make sense of it to be able to improve outcomes and outputs.

Beyond meeting the challenge of the data paradox, I have a hope that when data are collected about higher education institutions or about student or learning outcomes or about the quality of higher education institutions, that valid, well-managed qualitative data are trusted to the same extent as quantitative data. There remains an innate suspicion of qualitative data – yet some of the more complex problems of higher education, particularly in teaching and learning, cannot be reduced to measurement in a simplistic, quantitative manner.

There is a fourth cluster of issues relating to the locus of responsibility for accountability. Who is the responsible person in the higher education context? Does an individual academic or a Dean or even a

vice-chancellor have sufficient control over the outcomes for an individual student that it is fair to hypothecate responsibility or accountability? Is it fair to aggregate responsibility for student outcomes to an institution rather than an individual?

Finally whilst we have come to accept proxies in the area of outcomes from higher education, I believe that it is lazy and counterproductive if we never move forward from them. Without experimentation, innovation, trialling of approaches, KPIs, assessment instruments and surveys – without accepting that we won't necessarily get the most perfect solution or result from our first, second or even fifth attempt at identifying, assessing and measuring outcomes, as a sector, higher education should be prepared to have a go.

The outcomes approach in accountability rests on the identification of thresholds or acceptable levels of performance against which the players are judged. This is where standards sit right at the centre of accountability. Standards are essentially an agreed definition of a level of performance or achievement. These can translate at a course level to statements of level of student performance against set criteria in particular assessment tasks.

I don't think there is any doubt that TEQSA's standards framework is in the vanguard of developments in higher education accountability internationally, but it is evolving in a context where many other countries are also looking at standards as the appropriate way to frame their future accountability approaches. Other countries will also be looking at Australia's leadership in this area over the coming years.

The accountability drivers internationally are numerous, but let me touch on some of them, which you are all too familiar with, and some of which I have already touched on:

- The quest for greater value for money from government funding/investment and the calls for more funding from higher education institutions, in the context of other competing priorities because of serious budget restraints.
- There is a growing interest by other countries in international education, in part looking at the successes that Australia and the United Kingdom have enjoyed. They are seeking to assert the superiority of their own systems – selling their institutions on the basis of their individual and collective quality – and they seek a 'currency' from which to make those comparisons of quality.
- An increasing number of developed countries are moving to higher education student fees – in doing so, positioning their students as consumers – with a choice, with a voice, with expectations.
- With the greater emphasis on student choice – there is always pressure to achieve informed choice – what information is needed to appropriately inform students and parents? Not just descriptions of courses but data about performance as well.
- A world-wide interest in league tables by governments and some would say by students and parents as well – these are increasingly focusing on performance not just descriptions and this interest is feeding a range of new developments in student outcomes testing.
- Thus the emergence of AHELO – OECD project; and the interest in the CLA in Australia.

In Australia we have experienced the push of international imperatives in addition to some particular national ones:

- A Labor Government committed to broadening participation without diminishing quality – and putting in safeguards to ensure that doesn't happen.
- Their response has been to establish a new approach to higher education regulation through the establishment of TEQSA.
- There has been a general change in improved responsiveness of universities in relation to communities, employers, governments.
- Employers are becoming more vocal about graduate employability.

All of these factors have driven our Government and that of other countries to see that a standards approach has merit.

TEQSA will monitor Australian higher education using a Standards framework. I believe that the area in the standards framework which will be the most challenging will be in teaching and learning standards.

I hope the sector does not repeat what I believe was a lost opportunity when the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF) was being designed and implemented. Whilst a controversial policy initiative, the implementation of the LTPF could have been a time for the sector to work with government to develop more appropriate indicators for quality outcomes in learning and teaching. The sector invested considerable energy into protesting against the implementation of the LTPF and succeeded in having it terminated, but performance funding in teaching and learning still remains a major policy interest for the Australian government.

The recently released Discussion paper by Interim TEQSA provides a very good description of the state of play in relation to teaching and learning standards, but it does not provide answers to all the challenges. TEQSA is clearly looking to the sector to contribute to moving Australia forward on this issue. If other countries had answers to these issues that were proven to work well, I have no doubt that Australia would adopt and adapt what has been proven to work elsewhere. But other countries do not have the answers. This is no reason for Australia's higher education sector not to take on these challenges.

In conclusion, I am very optimistic about the maturity of the Australian higher education sector to be able to respond positively to the challenges of the changing context in accountability. I think that Australia's academic community does need to engage more actively in the debate about accountability, outcomes and standards and not just leave it to the few brave souls who are considered to be experts in the field. It is important that all academics and institutional leaders realise that they have a responsibility to be accountable. I do not think that is unreasonable. But it is fair and indeed healthy for our nation and for higher education, that there is an active debate about how the outcomes of higher education should be identified, defined, assessed, measured and aggregated.

My hope is that individual academics and the higher education sector will come to understand the context of accountability in a way that enables them to continue to rightfully question unexplored assumptions, but also positions them to be able to respond in a positive, constructive and indeed healthy way.

So let's rephrase the title of my presentation. "Trust me I'm an academic, and I am happy to provide evidence of how I perform and the outcomes I achieve, because I know that whether my discipline profession is in engineering, law or science, that I am also a professional as an academic and I should be and will be appropriately accountable for my performance and outcomes."

## Paper Sessions

### A Strategic Approach to Enhancing Student Success at Massey University

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#### Abstract

*A major objective for Massey University is the implementation of practices that enhance student retention, success and completion. An overarching framework has been developed to provide a strategic direction to support the achievement of that objective. The framework is based on a coordinated, evidence-based approach to evaluating initiatives to enhance student retention, success and completion, and the expansion of successful practices across the University. This paper provides a context for the development of the strategic framework. The paper outlines the structure of the framework, which is based on effective support at each stage of the study life cycle and a holistic approach to student services. The paper highlights the major initiatives currently in place at the University to enhance student retention, success and completion. The paper concludes with an overview of the goals and objectives that have been developed to provide a framework to evaluate the effectiveness of these initiatives.*

**Keywords:** retention success and completion, strategic framework, evaluation

#### Introduction

Massey University is committed to strengthening support for student achievement and to implementing practices that enhance student retention, success and completion. This commitment is articulated in the University's strategic document 'The Road to 2020' where Big Goal 2: Teaching and Learning refers to the University's commitment to ensuring 'an exceptional and distinctive learning experience at Massey for all students' (p. 1), based on an agenda of quality improvement. A related objective is to facilitate admission of those students with the potential to succeed and to contribute, supporting students to achieve academic success throughout their study, and ensuring that the policy and regulatory framework supports successful completion outcomes.

The achievement of that goal is supported by an overarching framework to enhance student achievement, completion and success of students enrolled in taught programmes at Massey University. A further factor informing the development of the framework is the proposed change to performance-based funding to be implemented from 2012. The strategy encompasses excellent academic administration, focused learning support and effective student life services. It is recognised that learning is a complex process to which teaching practice, sound curriculum development and pedagogical pluralities are central, however this strategy is focussed primarily on non-academic interventions and support initiatives. An underpinning principle is effective strategic planning supported by the implementation of best practices that contribute to a quality learning experience.

A coordinated evidence-based system to monitor and evaluate outcomes is a critical component of a strategic approach to enhancing student retention, success and completion. It is essential to comprehensively test the effectiveness of initiatives to enhance student success in terms of resource investment and the quality of service delivered.

This paper outlines the structure of the framework, which is based on effective support at each stage of the study life cycle and a holistic approach to student services and student administration. The major initiatives currently in place to support the achievement of the strategy are then discussed. The paper concludes with an overview of the goals and objectives which have been developed to provide a framework to evaluate the effectiveness of the initiatives to support student success.

### ***Framework Structure***

The strategic framework for student success is based on the principles of effective student support at each stage of the study life cycle and a holistic approach to student services. Furthermore, it aims to customise services to meet student needs for specific cohorts. This means that services will be cost effective and targeted. This concept is derived from an externally funded project (Tertiary Education Commission – TEC) which allowed the University to develop a supportive framework for the delivery of services to its distance students and also to develop a series of on-line tools to provide this support (Bridging the Distance Project). The work drew from the work done by Ormond Simpson, lately from the Open University, who also acted as an external consultant. The project began in 2009 with an extensive review of current literature, to determine best practice. On the basis of this work including that of Simpson, (2009), the framework incorporated the focus on student cohort needs introduced by Keitha Wilson (2009) from Griffiths University with a Study life cycle approach. This work has been more fully described elsewhere (Mackay et al, 2010, Shillington, et al., 2011 – *in press*).

The resulting framework allows for the delivery of customised services to particular cohorts of students at a particular moment in their study life cycle. Although specifically developed to provide services for Distance students, it has since been utilised to inform the delivery of services to all students (Shillington. et al, 2011, *in press*).

This has been particularly useful as Massey University takes a new approach to the way services are aligned across its three campuses. Before 2010, services provided to students were run on a campus-by-campus basis, with a great deal of autonomy between campuses. As a result of an internal project “Shared Services” considerable work has been undertaken to align services across the three campuses. The Campus Registrars are tasked with aligning services in a holistic fashion.

This approach is seen in a very positive light by students as it enables them to see how specific services could contribute to their success. The model and framework have also assisted in the ongoing consultation process with Students Associations, which are necessary to obtain “buy-in” and understanding on the part of students and the support services to best meet the needs of students.

The model also acknowledges quite clearly the importance of other “non-university” factors in students’ success – such as family support (Zepke, et al., 2004) and the need to be physically fit. Seeing services as holistic has also allowed for services to work together to common goals rather than service specific ones and also to incorporate smaller services into larger services to achieve a critical mass on a particular campus.

### ***Major Current Initiatives***

In order to illustrate the practical application of the strategic framework and to take the opportunity to share our practices; a selection of the major current initiatives to support student success are discussed.

#### ***Centres for Teaching and Learning***

The association between teacher development/support and student learning development services has become integrated through the establishment of Centres for Teaching and Learning on each campus. The Centres work in close collaboration with Colleges and with Student Life Services to ensure seamless end-to-end delivery of support to students. The Centres also provide much-needed support to academic staff in the development and provision of students studying on-line and at a distance. It is envisaged that the

integration of teaching support and learning support will have a positive impact on student achievement and will facilitate integrated curriculum design from both teacher and learner perspectives.

### *Distance Education*

Distance learning is a major component of New Zealand's educational provision and Massey University has led the tertiary sector by providing the most diverse and comprehensive university-level distance courses for more than 50 years. Massey's leadership in distance education provides a rich evidence base upon which to build best practices for supporting the achievement and retention of distance learners, focussed on a holistic student experience supported by quality customised student services throughout the study life cycle.

Examples of ongoing initiatives in this area include an annual distance student satisfaction survey; outbounding student contact via phone with all first year distance students to ensure they have successfully commenced study, and to students who have not submitted their first assignment on time; the Online Learning and Writing Link (OWLL), and Counselling Resources on the Web (CROW). Massey staff continues to make notable contributions to the research base on student retention and the first year experience (e.g., Zepke, et al., 2005; Zepke & Leach, 2010) providing demonstrable evidence of the leadership role the University continues to play in this part of the sector.

### *Online Learning Environment*

The University's new online learning environment has been branded as "Stream". Stream aims to help all students feel part of a learning community. It allows learners to share and exchange their ideas with fellow students and staff. A large number of the papers now support online conversations using web-based discussion. There is a wealth of literature which identifies the importance of interactivity in promoting student engagement (Bernard, et. al., 2009) and Stream is designed to support new forms of online interactions between students, staff and content.

Evidence so far suggests that students have embraced the opportunities that Stream provides to enhance learning, as illustrated by the findings from several recent surveys (e.g. AUSSE 2010). The successful implementation of Stream has already been recognised internationally as a leading-edge development in the support of 21st century learners. The University is continuing to lead the way in promoting greater student engagement through new technology by implementing several digital learning resource initiatives. The aim is to provide all students with a fully integrated digital learning experience which incorporates the best of conventional study methods with new forms of blended delivery.

### *The Identification and Support of Students at Risk*

An important component in the delivery of "just-in-time" services to students to support them at a particular point in their academic career is the identification of students who would benefit from particular interventions. Equally important is the identification of a hopefully diminishing group of students who have not succeeded in their assessments. Massey University has taken a two-pronged approach to this task. Firstly, an Early Intervention System (EIS) has been developed. This is a software system which grew out of the "Bridging the Distance" project described earlier. Students identified through the EIS are contacted and if necessary referred to the appropriate services.

Secondly, Academic Programme Monitoring (APM) has been introduced to work with students who have already had some experience of failure – either as a first time after a successful study period, or as first time students who have not managed to pass 50% or more of their papers, or students who have a longer record of non-achievement. This involves contact being made with students who are then referred to a service of their choice to provide further assistance if required. These services are most commonly counselling services or learning support. However, course and paper choice and career advice are also sometimes accessed. Alongside the APM has also been a review of exclusion policy and regulations to ensure that unsuccessful students are assisted to exit appropriately when necessary.



### *Student Administration Alignment Project*

Student Administration Services are being improved with the intent to provide swifter, more efficient processes to support student grade submission, clear and accurate recording of completion pathways and changes to qualifications. Work is also being undertaken to establish appropriate timeframes for qualification completions and any appropriate articulation between qualifications as well as the identification of the eligibility to graduate and the conferment of any degree within 12 months of students being notified of their eligibility to graduate.

### ***A Framework for Evaluation***

A coherent strategy supported by a framework that delivers a quality, end-to-end, customised suite of interventions to support student success has been outlined in this paper. These initiatives need to be comprehensively tested to ensure that they are delivering positive outcomes in terms of the University's agenda of quality improvement. It should be noted that much of the work is new and is still evolving.

Massey University already has an extensive programme in place to enhance student success. However, it is now acknowledged that it is crucial to understand the programme within a rational framework and to coordinate the effort. The evaluation of the range of initiatives outlined in the preceding part of the paper goes to the heart of the matter and a strategic framework to evaluate the effectiveness of the above-mentioned initiatives to support student success is critical. To this end, four goals and related objectives have been developed as a framework for evaluation.

1. We will ensure a comprehensive and integrated suite of support services that meets the needs of all students and we will support all students to achieve success.

#### Objectives:

- Engage in ongoing consultation with Student Associations to ensure that the needs of students are met and that students are kept well informed about support initiatives (Student Success Framework and Student Experience model).
- Ensure that students understand what is required to study successfully and support them in their preparation for tertiary study (On line tools from Bridging the Distance).
- Have defined systems, processes and (as appropriate) interventions to support students' successful academic and social orientation, integration and progression through university (Holistic model of students support, Student Success framework).
- Implement the offering of numeracy and literacy rich pre-entry courses to enable non-matriculated students to evaluate their ability to succeed at tertiary level.
- Review our exclusion policy and regulations to ensure that they identify and manage the exit of unsuccessful students appropriately (Reviewed alongside APM).
- Review our admission and enrolment regulations to ensure that they enhance the University's ability to maximise the likelihood of student success.

2. We will ensure that students studying at a distance and online will be supported to achieve academic success in ways that address the particular challenges of those modes of study.

#### Objectives:

- Continue the implementation, evaluation and refinement of the 'Bridging the Distance' suite of support (as described).
- Provide professional development for academic staff to enhance provision of support for students studying online and at a distance (Teaching and Learning Centres.)

3. We will ensure efficient, effective and seamless administrative systems and procedures to support student success.

Objectives:

- Ensure the timely submission and processing of student grades. (Shared Services project – Student Administration Services alignment)
- Continue the identification of and support for ‘at risk’ students through the Early Intervention System and the Academic Progress Monitoring project (as described).
- Ensure staff awareness of the support that is available for students who are struggling and that they refer students to those supports as necessary (Teaching and Learning Centres, Student Success Framework, Student Experience Model).
- Ensure that completion pathways and/or transition procedures are clearly articulated and noted on the students’ record when changes to a qualification or specialisation are made.
- Establish timeframes for the completion of all university qualifications, incorporating (where appropriate) the use of stair casing (Shared Services Project – Student Administration alignment).
- Continue to flag eligibility to graduate (students are required to apply to have their qualification conferred within twelve months of notification). (Shared Services Project – Student Administration alignment).

4. We will evaluate the effectiveness of our strategies regularly, and review and revise our approaches based on a sound evidence base.

Objectives:

- Undertake data collection (including specific measures for Māori, Pasifika, students living with disabilities and international students to determine whether the initiatives are having a positive effect on these cohorts).
- Regularly gather data on Massey student success rates at paper, department, programme, College, and University levels (to allow resources to be focussed where they are most needed).
- Benchmark our activities against comparable institutions nationally and internationally (external reference points to indicate areas for improvement).
- Develop a comprehensive model of course quality assurance based on best practice from Universities with a similar profile (to inform the activities of Campus Centres for Teaching and Learning, Student Life Services and Colleges).
- Utilise the outcomes of the data analysis and evaluation activities to:
  - Assess the impact of completion-enhancement initiatives both individually and overall, and in relation to Māori, Pasifika, students living with disabilities and international students.
  - Prioritise those initiatives that could be expanded or scaled down.
  - Inform University-level planning and monitoring reports.

A coordinated, evidence-based system to monitor and evaluate outcomes is a critical component of a strategic approach to enhancing student retention, success and completion. The goals and objectives informing the framework for evaluation have been developed to comprehensively test the effectiveness of the initiatives to enhance student success in terms of the University’s commitment to deliver a quality learning experience. The effectiveness of the framework as a basis for evaluation will be assessed as part of the review process.

## Conclusion

This paper has presented a context for the development of a strategic framework to support student success based on effective support at each stage of the study life cycle and a holistic approach to support services. To facilitate the sharing of practices, the major initiatives supporting student success were highlighted. A process to evaluate the effectiveness of these initiatives was then presented using key goals and related objectives as a framework.

The University's commitment to enhancing student achievement has been demonstrated by the extensive activities undertaken at Campus, Department and College level, and the comprehensive initiatives in place to support student success. We are now focussed on harnessing the strategic framework as a mechanism for coordinating and evaluating those initiatives to assist us to further enhance and expand successful practices across the University.

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## Demonstrating Quality – Feedback on Feedback

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### Abstract

*In recent years academic literature and university policy have focussed on two aspects of feedback. Firstly, the need to provide timely feedback; meaning in time to enable students to incorporate the feedback into their subsequent learning and secondly, the need to provide appropriate feedback; meaning feedback which gives students sufficient guidance and direction as to what they need to do to improve.*

*What has not been so well addressed is examination of the differing views and expectations between what students perceive as useful and timely feedback and what teachers see as appropriate and reasonable feedback.*

*This paper examines the issue of feedback from the student perspective drawing on a recent student survey conducted at a large Group of Eight (Go8) university in Australia. The findings suggest that feedback practices are improving but they also reveal some of the reasons why students continue to raise 'feedback' as an issue of concern.*

**Keywords:** feedback, evaluation, students

### Introduction

At first glance the concept of providing 'feedback' may seem quite simple. However, the fact that it continues to be regularly raised by students when asked about their overall study experience as well as their experience in specific units (subjects), confirms that there is a wide range of views and expectations about what is meant by providing feedback (for example, Nair & Bennett, 2011).

For many decades educational theorists have studied the importance of feedback and how it shapes and facilitates behaviour, learning and achievement (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Ramsden, 1992). The literature generally discusses feedback in terms of it being a process which distinguishes between the actual results obtained with that of the desired outcome (Mory 2004). More recently, timeliness and appropriateness, meaning helpfulness of feedback, have received special attention. Ramsden (1992) indicates that these two components are crucial to providing 'effective' feedback. Effective feedback is also quite complex and layered. For example, Knight and Yorke (2003) suggest that each student should receive feedback that is appropriate to his/her learning and be framed in such a way that it enables the student to use the feedback to develop his/her work.

Academic literature contains many works on best ways of giving feedback (Cree 2000; Ramsden 1998). Yet despite the arguments of and efforts over the last 10 to 15 years by educational developers from around the world, there is evidence that the quality of feedback experienced by students remains a source of dissatisfaction. For example, a review of research findings from the United Kingdom concluded that while feedback is valued by students, their experiences are varied (Hounsell 2003). The review

highlighted that the quantity and the helpfulness of such feedback varied from unit to unit and from one teacher to another.

There is strong support for the view that providing effective feedback to students is critical to learning and teaching (Ramsden 1998). Studies indicate that feedback is also pivotal to student decision making and overall educational experience. Poulos and Mahony (2008) looked at effective feedback from the student perspective and not only reinforced the value of timely and accessible feedback for learning but indicated that the effectiveness of feedback plays an integral role in the transition of students from senior secondary studies to first year university. The study goes on to note that the credibility and hence impact of feedback is influenced by student perceptions of the provider.

What is the primary role of feedback? Mory (2004) suggests that feedback is a form of communication that is critical in providing the right and correct knowledge in a learning environment. Feedback must therefore be seen as the encouragement of learning resulting in students being able to develop further in their learning process.

Feedback preferences are well documented in the research literature. For example Scott's (2005) work, which analysed comments from students who have graduated, concluded that improving feedback to students was easy if the following principles were followed. These principles include: returning marked work promptly; ensuring students get the feedback before the next task is due; and, providing students with a reasonable amount of written feedback on their assessed work along with suggestions for improvement. Scott also indicated that feedback should be provided in a clear and supportive tone to encourage change and development.

Some researchers have also spent time studying and understanding feedback from the student perspective. Crisp (2009) pointed out that students use feedback in different ways including: for enhancing their learning; for motivation; and for charting their progress. Poulos and Mahony (2008) concluded that from the student perspective, there are three key dimensions to effective feedback. These are: their perception of the value of the feedback; the impact of the feedback; and the credibility of the feedback. This paper sets out to add further to the literature on understanding student feedback from the perspective of students.

### ***Context***

The university from which these data were drawn is a large research intensive Group of Eight (Go8) university in Australia with a significant international student profile. The university operates across six domestic campuses and two offshore sites and has relationships with a number of international centres of study and educational partners.

The practice of administering unit (subject) evaluations has been in place since 2005 as part of the quality assurance processes of the institution. The evaluations have been conducted using a survey questionnaire. Students are asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements using a Likert scale of 1 to 5 (1 being strongly disagree through to 5 being strongly agree). Two open-ended questions enable students to provide some additional qualitative responses.

The survey is administered over a five-week period (weeks 8–13) in each semester. Two modes of administration are available, paper-based and online. Each faculty in the university makes a selection of units that will be evaluated by either mode. One unit can only be evaluated by one method of administration in that semester. Students in units selected to be electronically evaluated are notified by email at the start of each five-week period. Students complete the evaluations by accessing each unit on the portal which is linked to the evaluation questionnaire. Reminder emails are sent weekly at set times to only students who have not responded. Students are advised in the emails that their responses remain anonymous and confidential and their student identity is not linked to their responses in the database. The

email also contains information on what the university does with the feedback and links to previous student feedback reports.

In addition the national course experience survey (CEQ) and university-wide surveys of the student experience have been conducted since 2003. Teacher evaluation surveys are conducted separately from the student experience of their units, course and overall study experience. In all these survey students have been asked questions about feedback, both in terms of timeliness and appropriateness. Consequently students have had several outlets to express their views and to provide written comment on their perceptions about the quality and effectiveness of the feedback that they receive.

Feedback was a recurring issue of concern identified in the survey results over a number of evaluation cycles. In response to this trend in the past two to three years a combination of university-wide and more narrowly focused department and unit-based strategies have been developed and implemented to address this concern. Some departments have made feedback a priority. Staff are encouraged to talk about feedback in class and to give examples of how students might obtain feedback from a number of sources. For example, by listening to responses in class, by discussing problems with peers, by reviewing exemplar answers to questions, and by completing online quizzes on topics on which they performed poorly. In other cases, where feedback has been identified as an issue in a specific unit, assessment schedules have been changed to ensure that students are given some formative assessment early in the semester so that there is an opportunity for them to receive feedback on their progress. In addition, a university-wide policy has been implemented whereby staff are encouraged to include in their Unit Guides (Outlines) details of recent improvements that have been made as a result of student feedback.

### ***Additional Survey Question on Feedback***

Prior to 2009 the Unit Evaluation questionnaire contained two questions on feedback; one, which focused on the timeliness of the feedback, and one, which focused on the appropriateness of the feedback. In addition two open-ended questions gave students the option of providing written responses to the following questions: 'What did you like most about this unit?' and 'What would you improve about this unit?' As discussed previously both the timeliness and appropriateness of feedback were constantly identified as an area of concern to students compared to the other items on the survey.

In an attempt to better understand these concerns, in second semester 2009 it was decided to trial an additional open-ended question which delved more deeply into feedback. The new question was: 'What feedback did you receive in this unit?' This question was only included in the Unit Evaluation surveys that were conducted online.

Although not the primary purpose for the inclusion of the question, it was also hoped that the question might provide some insights as to whether concerns with feedback were still a major issue with students. It was thought that the data might indicate if students had noticed any improvement to feedback around the time the intervention strategies were being implemented.

### ***Findings***

A total of 9551 responses, mostly short sentence responses were posted to the question: 'What feedback did you receive in this unit?' Responses were received across all faculties with students from the Faculty of Arts, (3077) Faculty of Education (1407) and the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (1225) contributing almost sixty per cent of the total responses.

The data was initially analysed in terms of the number of responses which indicated that the student had received feedback and the number of responses that indicated they had not received feedback. The former group was further broken down into three categories: the number of responses which indicated that the feedback had resulted in a positive outcome for the student, the number of responses that did not indicate whether the student found the feedback useful or not and the number of responses where the student

indicated that the feedback they received was negative and had not provided any direction for improvement.

Table 1 below contains the results from an initial analysis of one-third (3765) of the total 9551 responses. Even though about 35% of the responses have been analysed a clear pattern started to emerge at the 5% analysis point and was confirmed at the 10%, 20% and 30% analysis points.

**Table 1: Breakdown of student responses on feedback**

Total number of responses analysed	Responses which indicated student received feedback	Responses which indicated no feedback provided
3765	93%	7%

Of the 93% of the respondents that indicated that they had been given feedback, just over half of the group (55%) reported that the feedback they received led to greater understanding and enabled them to improve their skills. Around a third of that group gave no indication if the feedback they received was helpful or not and just under 12% of the group reported that they received feedback but that it was unhelpful. The main reasons they gave for this view was that the feedback contained no advice on how to improve or that it was received too late to influence their next assignment.

### ***Discussion***

The findings from this initial analysis highlight a number of issues about how students perceive feedback and how they rated the value of the feedback they received during their studies in second semester 2009. Based on earlier experience, the view was that students often fail to recognise when they are being given feedback and provide low scores on feedback questions related to whether they received feedback and if it was helpful. The fact that in this survey round 93% of the students indicated that they had received feedback was much higher than anticipated. It was also somewhat surprising that over half of those who indicated that they had received feedback also reported that the feedback was positive and helpful to their learning.

The almost 12% of students who received feedback, but reported it as being a negative experience, provides a salient reminder to staff. This observation speaks to the need to provide sufficient detail in the feedback to enable students to see what needs to improve and how they might achieve this improvement. It also reinforces the need to provide the feedback in time to enable students to absorb the advice and apply it to future assessments.

It is also interesting to note that the analysis of the responses to the open-ended question on feedback in the second semester 2009 unit evaluations correlates highly with the closed question which was also included in the survey (see Table 2). Students were asked to respond on a Likert scale to the question: "The feedback I received in the unit was useful." 11.4% of the students indicated that they strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement compared to the almost 12% who indicated that they found the feedback negative in the open-ended question while 61.3% indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed that the feedback was useful compared to 52% in the open-ended responses which indicated that the feedback was positive (with overall 82% indicating that they had received feedback and there was no indication that this was viewed negatively).

**Table 2: Correlation of open-ended question on feedback with quantitative item**

Questions/Items	Disagree + Strongly Agree (%)	Agree + Strongly Agree (%)
Quantitative item	11.4	61.3
Open ended question	12.0	52.0

Further analysis of the 7% of responses to the open-ended question that indicated they had not received any feedback revealed a mix of attitudes and understanding. There was a small group of students who clearly did not understand what is meant by feedback. There was another group who had a narrow view of feedback and indicated that they had not received any feedback (only a mark on an assignment with no written comments) and another group, mainly students undertaking online studies, indicated that they had not submitted any assignments as yet so had not had a chance to be given feedback.

The 12% who indicated that the feedback they received was negative provided a range of reasons for their opinion including: the feedback was too late to help with the next assignment; there was no clear marking criteria; the comments on my assignment were vague or illegible; the tutors advice conflicted with the marker; and, the feedback was not detailed enough and did not provide information on how to improve.

The 52% who indicated that the feedback was positive referred to feedback which was progressive and consistent, feedback which was helpful, useful, constructive and timely. The positive responses also recognised a range of feedback often acknowledging the value of feedback from peers, tutors and class discussions.

### ***Conclusion***

The findings from an initial analysis of the responses tend to suggest that while over the years feedback has been raised as a big concern by students at this university, and indeed at many other universities, students who took part in this survey recognise that they do receive feedback and significant numbers of students found that the feedback they got was very helpful.

From this analysis it is not possible to say whether or not the improvement in student perceptions of feedback was a direct result of the parallel interventions and efforts being made by staff to engage with students and provide more timely and useful feedback. However, the preliminary analysis gives hope to the view that staff are beginning to recognise the value of giving timely and helpful feedback and that students are beginning to take some responsibility for giving and receiving feedback.

Another clear message from the analysis so far is that feedback needs to be constructive, especially where the student is finding the unit challenging. In order to learn from assessment students clearly indicated the value of guidelines on how to improve. Feedback that only focused on what was wrong with an assignment or test was viewed as a barrier to learning. Similarly feedback that was received too late to be incorporated into a subsequent assessment was also viewed negatively.

Promising aspect of the analysis are:

- generally there is a positive view among the student cohort on feedback practices at the university; and,
- a number of students are adopting an expansive view of feedback seeing peer feedback and tutorial discussion as forms of feedback.



However, the initial analysis does reveal that there is still some misunderstanding in the student community in the ways feedback is given as well as a need to facilitate teaching improvements in some areas to improve the usefulness and timing of such feedback.

These findings also have implications for future policy and practices within faculties and would benefit from further investigation and discussion on the quality and timeliness of collecting and providing feedback to students and the impact on the learning experience.

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## Evaluation Criteria and Evidence for a Self Review of Higher Degree Research

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### Abstract

*In preparation for the Cycle 2 AUQA audit, higher degree research (HDR) at the University of Tasmania (UTAS) was identified as an area for self review to ascertain areas of strength and areas for improvement. The self review process included the development of evaluation criteria to provide a foundation for the development of standards for higher degree research at UTAS. These criteria were developed from a scoping exercise of Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 AUQA audit reports and the AUQA academic standards framework and were contextualised for HDR at UTAS. Evidence was collected against these criteria to demonstrate quality and standards in HDR. The self-review provided a number of recommendations that mirrored the (largely) north American Council of Graduate Schools principles for assessing the quality of HDR training; mainly, improving completion rates, clarifying career pathways for HDR candidates, preparing future faculty and preparing future professionals. The self review process at UTAS proved to be an invaluable tool to inform improvements in the quality of HDR training at the university and for informing strategic planning. This paper examines the evaluation criteria and identifies the evidence relied upon by audit panels when assessing quality in HDR training.*

**Keywords:** self review, evaluation criteria, higher degree research, benchmark

### Introduction

The recent emergence of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), to replace Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), has driven a focus on standards through the introduction of the Higher Education Standards Framework. An essential feature of this framework is the inclusion of 'Qualification Standards' based on the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF). These standards are to ensure universities demonstrate quality in HDR. A number of universities in their Cycle 2 AUQA audits undertook major self reviews in Research/Research Training (Bond, Charles Darwin, La Trobe, Macquarie, Melbourne, New South Wales and Newcastle) which led these institutions to build staff capabilities and capacity for improving and enhancing standards in HDR.

At the same time, universities are increasing opportunities for HDR training as a result of Government policy initiative which establish a target of 40 per cent of Australian 25 to 34-year-olds to possess a bachelor qualification or higher by 2025. Recent policy initiatives such as the Excellence in Research in Australia (ERA), the Super Science Initiative and Postgraduate Research Student Support have resulted in a focus on measuring and improving research quality. Edwards (2010) argues that there will be substantial growth in domestic training capabilities as a result of the demand for PhDs based on the recent changes to Government policy. Universities are therefore interested in enhancing and expanding their research profile through the continued development of their HDR programs.

Universities, both nationally and internationally, are currently identifying challenges in HDR programs. A major US report identified the challenges in graduate school education – demographic shifts in population, international migration, increasing number of 'non-traditional' candidates and increasing numbers of individuals returning to graduate school after having spent time in the workforce (Wendler et

al., 2010). These challenges are impacting on the quality assurance processes in HDR training. The UK, through their Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), has HDR programs as one of their key reference points for assuring quality in universities. In Australia, a recent Global Leaders Summit, jointly sponsored by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) and the Go8, addressed the topic of measuring and assessing quality in HDR programs. The Summit recognised ten principles for best practice for HDR training. The first principle is about ensuring and improving the quality of HDR training, candidate student learning and professional development, and includes the following evaluation criteria:

- Admission criteria and recruitment
- Student learning outcomes, including transferable skills
- Mentoring and supervising structures
- Infrastructure for HDR training
- Quality of student experiences
- Measures of completion and attrition
- Career placement both inside and outside academe (Council of Graduate Schools, 2010)

### ***Methodology***

In preparation for a Cycle 2 AUQA audit at the University of Tasmania (UTAS), a self review of HDR was undertaken (September-October, 2010). The evaluation criteria for the self review of HDR were developed from a desk-review of AUQA audit reports (37 universities and both Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 reports were reviewed) and reference to the AUQA Framework for Standards, Evidence and Outcomes (AUQA, 2010) and are as follows:

1. Planning, governance and policy arrangements
  - a) Strategic and operational planning
  - b) Organisational structures and corporate governance
  - c) Academic governance
2. Financial management processes
3. Supervision
4. Candidate progression and retention
5. Articulation pathways
6. Feedback from stakeholders and candidates
7. International candidates
8. Indigenous candidates
9. International research agreements and research training partnerships
10. Candidate Support
  - a) Administrative
  - b) Financial
  - c) Academic
11. Benchmarking

The question: 'How do you know?' (Carmichael, 2010) framed the self review process and shaped the inquiry designed for the collection of evidence to demonstrate quality and standards in HDR measured against each criterion. The review process was designed to measure what were our achievements against a criterion, what evidence do we have, what processes and outcomes relate to the criterion and how well are we performing (Adams et al 2008, p.17). These findings were used to assist in the development of recommendations for improving the quality of HDR in all the above criteria.

## ***Evaluation Criteria for Self Review of HDR***

### ***Criterion 1: Planning, Governance and Policy Arrangements***

- a) *Strategic and Operational Planning*: Universities must demonstrate an alignment of their strategic planning with operational planning, resources and staffing requirements. The strategic goals in Research need to be aligned to the planning and resourcing in Research Training. Examples of evidence: University Strategic Plans, Research and Research Training Plans.
- b) *Organisational Structures and Corporate Governance*: Nationally, HDR has seen a restructure in organisational structures to meet the increasing growth in training. There has been a shift away from Graduate Administrative Services/Offices/Units towards the development of Graduate Schools (positioned either centrally or in faculties). A number of Australian universities position HDR within their Research Divisional structure, not unlike 'super faculties' and those with a strong research culture reflect this change by referring to them as the Faculty of Graduate Research/Studies. Universities in their establishment phase or with less emphasis on research, structure HDR within 'Research Offices', placing a stronger focus on administrative rather than academic support for candidates.

Some universities in response to Federal Government initiatives are positioning research training as a priority and have invested in leadership positions in HDR to build their research profile. Audit panels examine how a university's corporate governance impacts on such areas as HDR. A lack of clarity in governance and management structures can contribute to governance problems and have an influence on the lines of reporting and communication (Shattock, 2006). Examples of evidence: University governance structures and reporting lines.

- c) *Academic Governance*: Academic governance relates to the structures, policies and processes which ensure quality outcomes (AUQA, 2010, p.2). Audit panels examine the role of research committees (or equivalent) to determine if there are defined terms of reference and agreed delegations of authority (Shattock, 2006). Policy arrangements in HDR focus on the development and oversight of policies in supervision, assessment of coursework programs, ethics/plagiarism, minimum resources for candidates, minimum standards for candidates, assessment, admission, curriculum, learning support, candidate grievances and appeals, candidate enrolment status and research programs.

### ***Criterion 2: Financial Management Processes***

In universities with a research focus the budget management in HDR is the responsibility of the Dean of Graduate Research/Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Graduate Research) who in turn reports to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research)/Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research). Business management practices relate to the internal processes for managing the budget for the allocated research centre/school/unit. Financial allocations in HDR relate specifically to improving the HDR candidate experience through the number of scholarships provided, improving resources and supporting candidates with adequate research training. Audit panels are interested in how the monetary investments of the institution improve candidate experience and retention.

### ***Criterion 3: Supervision***

Audit panels recommend that universities address the following key themes for the supervision of candidates- guidelines and registration; quality assurance processes and professional development for supervisors.

- a) *Guidelines and Registration*: Audit panels recommend that guidelines for supervisors are developed so as to ensure consistency in the standards of supervision across the institution. Some panels recommend that registration for supervisors is mandatory, particularly in universities building their research culture and capacity. Examples of evidence: supervisor register, guidelines and policies.

- b) *Quality Assurance Processes and Frameworks*: Audit panels are interested in the development of University-wide quality assurance processes in respect to research supervision and candidate feedback. Examples of evidence include the collection of feedback on supervisors from candidates in their annual review process; the development of a process to measure the quality of research supervision through the supervisor register and the development of an overall quality assurance framework for HDR.
- c) *Professional Development for Supervisors*: The professional development and training of graduate research supervisors is an area for improvement for many universities. Audit panels commend universities that demonstrate supervisor training accreditation programs, the use of supervisory panels instead of sole supervisors and give examples of good practice in offshore teaching of research higher degree candidates. An issue related to supervisory panels or groupings is a greater emphasis on monitoring the quality of research supervision if it involves various researchers from other institutions. Also, an ongoing issue is developing mechanisms in performance management which address poor quality supervisory practices, as well as promoting good practice. Examples of evidence: training modules and workshops for supervisors.

#### *Criterion 4: Candidate Progression and Retention*

Candidate progression and retention are significant indicators in understanding the support that is given to candidates. Audit panels review completion and satisfaction rates and the processes universities have in place to monitor and review candidate progression and retention. Examples of evidence: candidate management practices, research learning plans; milestone checks, annual reviews of progress; analysis of candidate surveys and keeping an 'at risk register.'

#### *Criterion 5: Articulation Pathways*

The postgraduate curriculum has been under debate nationally and internationally for a number of years now, following Bologna and the introduction of the Melbourne Model. The present issues in HDR are articulation pathways (Honours) into postgraduate research, Masters Coursework (credential creep) and the alignment to the AQF. The developing trend in HDR is towards the introduction of postgraduate qualifications which tie more closely with industry and offer a more practical focus. Audit panels look for evidence of adherence to the AQF and individual statements of graduate abilities.

#### *Criterion 6: Feedback from Stakeholders and Candidates*

Audit panels are interested in how universities improve learning and teaching through the effective use of feedback from stakeholders and candidates. Examples of evidence include tracking the career destinations of PhD candidates; providing timely feedback as a result of the annual surveys and details of any subsequent improvements in place; and the development of annual improvement priorities which arise from data from candidate surveys.

#### *Criterion 7: International Candidates*

With the increasing international presence in Australian universities, internationalisation has become a category of major importance to universities. Audit panels examine how universities are able to provide support and a sense of intellectual community for international higher degree candidates. Examples of evidence include feedback from international candidates regarding not only courses and teaching but also to services and opportunities provided to them with the intention of improving candidate experience of campus life. Audit panels also pay attention to entrance credentials and language requirements.

#### *Criterion 8: Indigenous Candidates*

Universities are developing mechanisms to support their indigenous HDR candidates. Many universities have strong mentoring programs for their indigenous candidates in undergraduate degrees and it is an area for improvement in higher degree research.

### *Criterion 9: International Research Agreements and Research Training Partnerships*

According to audit panels international research agreements and research training partnerships is an area for improvement for many universities. There needs to be more work in monitoring partnership agreements/contracts and responsibilities. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) may include expectations of candidate support and facilities that a partner will provide but audit panels recommend that documented processes for ensuring these expectations are met are in place. Evidence: cotutelle arrangements backed by MOUs and/or candidate agreements that articulate the requirements concerning ownership, resourcing, responsibilities and academic requirements.

### *Criterion 10: Candidate Support*

Candidate support includes administrative, financial and academic support. Administrative support relates to the enrolment and administrative arrangements in assisting candidates through their degree. Financial support relates to access to space, computers, assistance with conference funding, scholarships and other funding related to candidature study. Academic support is about how universities set up a research training program which supports candidates and early career researchers with the necessary skills to assist them in their degree/career. It also is about providing time allocation to support study arrangements and having the assistance of university teaching and learning staff through professional development programs. Candidate career development and closer collaboration with employers is an area for improvement in HDR programs.

### *Criterion 11: Benchmarking*

Audit panels recommend that universities need to improve the ways in which they undertake benchmarking initiatives. Areas for consideration are candidate assessment/grading, benchmarking processes for input from candidates, employers and other external stakeholders, benchmarking provision of resources and peer review activities assessing and evaluating against international as well as domestic benchmarks.

## **Discussion**

The self review of HDR was a helpful tool *to inform improvements in the quality of HDR training at the university and for informing strategic planning. With regards to quality assurance processes, the self review highlighted some key lessons learnt:*

- develop transparent and rigorous processes for maintaining and assuring the quality of HDR training and management on a regular basis;
- initiate a Graduate Research Coordinators network to ensure consistency and develop and share good practices in HDR;
- develop a process for monitoring the quality of theses based on HDR candidate completion rates rather than completion times. The completion data in the self review identified a clear need for improvement;
- determine how data will be analysed, such as a faculty or discipline focus;
- develop infrastructure for validating the development of new units in HDR training programs;
- use survey data to candidates and supervisors to formatively improve the quality of supervision and communicate improvements based on feedback to candidates and supervisors; and
- analyse feedback data at various stages of candidature to maximise quality outcomes and for early intervention to identify and assist 'candidates at risk'.

## **Conclusion**

The self review of HDR at UTAS produced 25 recommendations which were endorsed by an international consultant during a subsequent peer review. The recommendations mirror both the CGS principles for assessing the quality of HDR education and the US findings for HDR training (Wendler et. al., 2010, pp. 42–43) which were about improving completion rates, clarifying career pathways for HDR candidates, preparing future faculty and preparing future professionals. The self review process at UTAS

proved to be an invaluable tool to inform improvements in the quality of HDR training at the university and for informing strategic planning in this area. The UTAS self-review will be used to inform a future benchmarking project on HDR training with Deakin University and the University of Wollongong.

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## Articulating and Comparing Standards Through Benchmarking of Assessment

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### Abstract

*The universities of Deakin, Tasmania (UTAS) and Wollongong (UOW) are not aligned with any university groups or networks. This paper presents their cross-institutional benchmarking relationship as a case study in building the necessary trust, collaboration and shared methodology. The partnership was distinguished by the way it tapped into a collegial quality improvement culture. It had its genesis at the 2009 AUQF conference and the partners adapted and 'test-drove' a framework previously developed by an ALTC Teaching Quality Indicators Project team. UTAS and UOW had formerly been involved in a trial benchmarking project on academic transition support in 2009 and extended this partnership to Deakin. The universities are comparable in terms of establishment, discipline areas, regional presence and experience of the AUQA audit cycle, with some significant contextual differences that needed to be recognised, such as structures and terminology. They are at similar stages in relation to the development of their benchmarking policy and processes. The focus on assessment ensured the project would explore the issues central to the Cycle 2 AUQA audits, such as standards, learning outcomes and student feedback. The explicit benchmarking of assessment processes made transparent the areas of improvement and areas of good practice in relation to assessment standards. Outcomes included action plans for each university and a robust framework for benchmarking assessment.*

**Keywords:** benchmarking, assessment, standards, benchmarking partnerships

### ***Benchmarking as an Approach to Standards***

The Australian university sector has entered a standards-driven phase of quality review and improvement with a new regulatory framework soon to be introduced under TEQSA. The meaning of 'standards' in higher education practice is still being determined. At this stage, all parties seem to agree that 'standards' do *not* mean uniformity, one-size-fits all or a national curriculum. Diversity is to be supported as a critical and valued feature of Australian universities (Bradley, 2011) and one which is fundamental to the role of universities in our civil society. Yet it is also agreed that 'standards' must have *substance*; they must provide a basis for comparison.

In the higher education context standards may define *minimum practice*, in the form of 'threshold standards'. Or they may seek to establish performance indicators with *levels of performance* (Coates, 2010). Or they may correspond to *statements of outcomes*, such as the discipline standards currently under development by ALTC-funded projects. Or they may be derived as a set of *benchmarks for good practice*, based on comparisons with similar operations and which may evolve as the sector or an institution matures. All of these approaches are valuable and offer enough flexibility to accommodate diversity. It is the last approach – standards derived from benchmarking good practice – that will be explored here.



### ***Benchmarking as a Process for Improvement***

This paper discusses the development, implementation and outcomes from an assessment benchmarking project and benchmarking partnership with the universities of Deakin, Tasmania (UTAS) and Wollongong (UOW) in 2010. Jackson and Lund (2000, cited in Stella & Woodhouse, 2007, p.14) define benchmarking as, ‘first and foremost, a learning process structured so as to enable those engaging in the process to compare their services/activities/products in order to identify their comparative strengths and weaknesses as a basis for self improvement and/or self regulation.’ The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) has encouraged benchmarking because it is ‘a systematic means of obtaining and specifying comparisons and learning from them’ (Stella & Woodhouse, 2007, p.18). Cycle 1 audits identified benchmarking as an area for improvement (Baird, 2006). The universities of Deakin, UTAS (including the Australian Maritime College) and UOW were all encouraged to lift their levels of benchmarking activity in their 2005–06 Cycle 1 audits.

The Cycle 2 audits require universities to provide an overview of benchmarking activities and outcomes and their impact (AUQA, 2011, p.38). A desk-review of Cycle 2 AUQA audits reports (Booth, 2011) found that universities are at three different stages of development towards benchmarking:

- *Early Implementation*: universities need to develop and implement a benchmarking framework, processes and partnerships as part of their Quality System
- *Further Refinement and Alignment*: universities have begun to implement benchmarking processes and partnerships but further refinement and alignment with other university processes is required
- *Full Embedding*: universities have established benchmarking frameworks, processes and partnerships across the sector and make extensive use of external reference points and benchmarking.

Deakin, UTAS and UOW are all undertaking Cycle 2 audits in 2011. Each has moved through an ‘early implementation’ stage of benchmarking and into ‘further refinement and alignment’.

The desk-review of Cycle 2 audit reports also identified key markers of a mature benchmarking process:

- A university wide approach to benchmarking aligned to strategic areas
- Alignment with a institutional data strategy, data warehouse and risk framework
- Unit and course level benchmarking
- Mechanisms for selecting appropriate institutions
- Establishment of benchmarking reference groups.

The next section will discuss the project aims and methodology, peer review outcomes and overall outcomes for the benchmarking project.

### ***Methodology***

#### ***Formation of Benchmarking Partnership***

The three universities were unaligned, but with pre-existing relationships, formed through a previous benchmarking project on Academic Transition Support (2009) between UTAS and UOW and through informal benchmarking between Deakin and UOW. They were comparable in terms of year established, multi-campus structure, regional presence, discipline areas and their experience of the AUQA audit cycles. Their benchmarking awareness and confidence had also grown over a three to four year period.

The immediate catalyst for the assessment project was the linking of like-minded project facilitators at the 2009 AUQF in Alice Springs. They were united in their commitment to making benchmarking work, their focus on standards and their willingness to be open and collaborative. This ‘meeting of minds’ was

essential for the project to work. It formed the basis for its successful management and the confidence to accommodate variations such as using it to compare Academic Board/Senate practices.

#### *Agreement on Area and Scope*

The partners identified assessment as an area for improvement which fell within the ambit of their Cycle 2 AUQA audits.

The project was carefully scoped through a collaborative process involving senior academic and quality leaders from each university. The project had to be achievable (1) with a reasonable amount of faculty effort and (2) within the timeframe of the project. It was therefore decided to:

- limit the scope to undergraduate programs (onshore and offshore)
- focus on a single year (2009)
- focus on the policy, procedure and practice pertaining to standards. Detailed benchmarking of assessment design for student learning was considered more suited to follow-up projects organised at the discipline level.

The role of Academic Board/Senate in relation to assessment policy and standards was included within the scope of the project but will not be discussed in detail in this paper.

#### *Agreement on Methodology*

This project would involve virtually every faculty across three universities. It was essential to strike the right balance between the time spent and the perceived benefits.

To focus discussion and maximise the effectiveness of meeting and self-review time, a streamlined but robust format for the benchmarking was developed. This format – including a scoping statement, performance indicators, good practice statements and performance measures – was derived from the Australasian Council on Open, Distance and E-Learning (ACODE) Benchmarking Framework (2007). For the indicators and measures, the project used as a reference point the Australian Teaching Quality Indicators Project (TQIP) on assessment (Davies, 2009). Three of the four TQIP statements were adapted as performance indicators:

1. Assessment purposes, processes and expected standards of performance are clearly communicated and supported by timely advice and feedback to students
2. Assessment practices and processes are fair, reliable and valid and produce marks and grades that represent the standards achieved by students
3. Assessment policies and procedures are developed, implemented, reviewed and improved in accord with quality principles.

The model was tested against the work of Boud et al (2010) and aspects of Boud's work not captured by TQIP were synthesised into the framework.

Faculty leaders were consulted on the model and methodology. The framework was enhanced by an expert reviewer (Prof Gordon Joughin). The questions were tested in faculty groups on one campus and further refined.

The result was a clear, robust framework for benchmarking assessment: see Appendix 1 (performance indicators, good practice statements and performance measures), Appendix 2 (extract from self-review template and ratings scale).

#### *Self-reviews Within each University*

All three universities used self-reviews not just for data collection and evaluation but also to facilitate discussion and reflection within each faculty and across the institution. When applying this approach each

university adopted different methodologies to suit their own organisational structures. For example, UTAS used a survey of academic staff as part of the evidence gathering and included postgraduate students in data analysis; UOW and Deakin formed Assessment Benchmarking Reference Groups; UOW included faculty leaders in self reviewing another faculty; Deakin's and UOW's Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning) coordinated the development of individual faculty self-reviews.

The common experience was highly collegial and educative, culminating in a high-level institutional review by a representative panel across all units involved. It showed that benchmarking is not alien to the academic experience; in fact the process mirrors collaborative projects in scholarship and research.

#### *Peer Review Process*

The peer review process involved all three partners in a face-to-face discussion. Leaders in teaching, learning and quality from the three universities met to compare the outcomes of their institutional reviews with reference to the agreed performance indicators and measures and to evaluate the evidence provided. The facilitators from each university conducted it as an interactive workshop.

Each university was able to discover where its practice was exceptional, where it met sector standards and where it may have lagged behind. Exemplars were identified to aid each university's improvement strategies. Strategies for addressing common problems were tested in discussion.

#### *Final Report and Action Plans*

Each university derived a plan for a way forward which would promote good practice, address improvements and identify areas for possible collaboration. The recommendations in these reports are currently being taken up by working groups and committees.

**Table 1: Leveraging good practice – some examples**

<b>Exemplar</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>UTAS has</b> carried out a comprehensive project on criterion-referenced assessment; outcomes included resources and exemplars and faculty champions.	<b>UOW action plan</b> and <b>Deakin action plan</b> both include a project to offer exemplars and staff development on writing marking guides and rubrics; these projects will benefit from the experience and resources of UTAS.
<b>Deakin has</b> developed a tool to map graduate attributes across courses.	<b>UTAS action plan</b> includes developing course-mapping software; UTAS will start this project by viewing the Deakin model.
<b>UOW has</b> a compulsory on-line module on academic integrity for all commencing undergraduate students.	<b>UTAS action plan</b> includes on-line modules on academic integrity for new students; UTAS will review the UOW and other existing models.

#### *Key Outcomes*

The overall key outcomes from the assessment benchmarking project include:

- The development of a highly useful tool for measuring assessment based on the Griffith TQIP project (Davies, 2009) and the work of Boud et al (2010). This project implemented and validated the broad indicators developed by TQIP.
- The identification of common areas for improvement in assessment standards which include developing best practice models on feedback; assessment standards for course levels and developing group exemplars for students. Findings demonstrate that assessment has to be sustainable for both students and staff (Boud, 2010). Benchmarking can also be seen as a process for articulating standards (Bell, 1999).
- The identification of key actions for improvement for each university to support institutional improvement. These included:

- establishing clearer connections between learning outcomes, Graduate Attributes/Qualities and assessment
- additional staff development and increased use of best practice models for teaching staff
- further work on marking practices for group work
- initiating discipline-based assessment benchmarking initiatives.
- The development of rigorous benchmarking processes, including Benchmarking Reference Groups. It was found that more work could be done benchmarking at the course/program level which reflects the national direction (Oliver, 2009).
- It was a mutual learning process for all involved. It contributed to enhancing organisational learning and aligning other processes, not just assessment, across the institutions. Examples include professional development for sessional staff; clarification of the roles and responsibilities of Associate Deans and the alignment to institutional data warehouse capacities.

Another valuable part of the benchmarking process has been the positive relationships which were formed and the possible future areas for collaboration in benchmarking.

### ***Success Factors for Higher Education Benchmarking***

After two major benchmarking projects across universities and three years' experience in negotiating successful implementation and outcomes, the following table is offered as a synthesis of the 'lessons learned'. These success factors, framed in Table 2 as questions to ask during the benchmarking journey, will not apply in every case but may assist particularly in large projects where initial preparation is critical.

**Table 2: Success factors for higher education benchmarking**

<b>1. Determine which areas to benchmark</b>	
Is this area aligned to strategic goals in priority areas? Will a major project in this area deliver significant benefits relative to the costs? Are there drivers in this area which will sustain energy for the process, and ensure that benchmarking is given priority? Is benchmarking in this area supported at the executive level and on the ground? Are there adequate human, financial and other resources to support benchmarking in this area?	
YES <i>Continue</i>	NO <i>Rethink</i>
<b>2. Identify benchmarking partners</b>	
If possible, is there a history of sharing practice and/or an established relationship to build upon? Do the partners have compatible institutional missions, values and goals? Is there a comparable commitment to benchmarking in this area from senior and other relevant managers of the partner institutions? Is there a high level of trust between senior and other relevant managers of the partner institutions? Is there a shared understanding of explicit benchmarking goals? Are all partners willing to share information and discuss successes and failures? Are the partners similar enough to offer transferable strategies in this area?	
YES <i>Continue</i>	NO <i>Rethink</i>
<b>3. Determine types and level of benchmarking</b>	
Is there broad agreement on the types of benchmarking, e.g. data-sharing, strategy-sharing, evidence-based self-review etc.? Is there broad agreement on the level of benchmarking (e.g. policy level, discipline level, course level, unit level)? Is there agreement on the model that should be the basis for benchmarking? If no existing model can be used or adapted, are	

<p>there sufficient resources to develop and test a suitable new model?</p> <p>Is there agreement on what is and what is not to be in scope?</p> <p>Is the scope realistic and achievable by the participants within the anticipated timeframe?</p>	
<p>YES</p> <p><i>Develop and sign MOU and continue</i></p>	<p>NO</p> <p><i>Rethink</i></p>
<p><b>4. Prepare benchmarking documents and templates including the purpose, scope of project, performance indicators, performance measures and performance data</b></p>	
<p>Have the indicators and measures been clearly documented and thoroughly reviewed by each university for alignment to local structures, processes and terminology?</p> <p>Are the indicators and measures aligned to accepted standards and good practice across the sector?</p> <p>Have participants who will be carrying out the benchmarking, e.g. faculty and/or professional leaders, had the opportunity to provide feedback to ensure clarity and fit?</p>	
<p>YES</p> <p><i>Continue</i></p>	<p>NO</p> <p><i>Further development needed</i></p>
<p><b>5. Design benchmarking process</b></p>	
<p>Is there a benchmarking reference/steering group?</p> <p>Have faculty and/or professional leaders had the opportunity to comment and contribute to the design of the process?</p> <p>Does the benchmarking process encourage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• engagement?</li> <li>• sharing, both within and across areas?</li> <li>• reflection?</li> <li>• an evidence-based approach?</li> <li>• identification of good practice?</li> <li>• identification of areas for improvement?</li> </ul> <p>Does the choice of process align with organisational culture – for example, does it mirror other forms of scholarly collaboration (e.g. round-tables, academic committees, surveys, comments on papers)?</p> <p>Does the process minimise demands on staff time?</p>	
<p>YES</p> <p><i>Continue</i></p>	<p>NO</p> <p><i>Further development needed</i></p>
<p><b>6. Implement benchmarking process</b></p>	
<p>Is there a communication plan?</p> <p>Have faculty and/or professional leaders been briefed on their responsibilities?</p> <p>Is there appropriate project management?</p> <p>Are there clear expectations for deliverables and deadlines?</p> <p>Is there a checking process (quality assurance)?</p>	
<p>YES</p> <p><i>Continue</i></p>	<p>NO</p> <p><i>Further development needed</i></p>
<p><b>7. Review results</b></p>	
<p>Have faculty and/or professional leaders had the opportunity to contribute to the review process?</p> <p>Does the review process encourage engagement, reflection and sharing, both within and across institutions?</p> <p>Is the review process designed to produce a clear evaluation, including ratings, identification of good practice and identification of areas for improvement?</p> <p>Is the review process carried out at multiple levels, e.g. faculty level, institutional level, across institutions?</p>	
<p>YES</p>	<p>NO</p>

<i>Continue</i>	<i>Further development needed</i>
<b>8. Communicate results and recommendations</b>	
<p>Do reports clearly identify good practice, standard practice and recommendations for improvement for each university?</p> <p>Within each university, is there a consultation process to obtain agreement on recommendations, e.g. through management and committee structures?</p> <p>Were participants acknowledged and thanked?</p> <p>Is there a process for sharing the benchmarking methodology and lessons learned with other areas of the university?</p>	
YES <i>Continue</i>	NO <i>Further development needed</i>
<b>9. Implement improvement strategies</b>	
<p>Are there clearly assigned responsibilities for implementing the recommended improvements?</p> <p>Have future collaborations between the universities been agreed, where this would assist improvements?</p> <p>Is there a process for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of recommended improvements and their effectiveness?</p>	

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***Appendix 1: Assessment Benchmarking Indicators, Good Practice Statements and Performance Measures – derived from Griffith TQIP, Statements and Quality Indicators of Good Practice in Assessment (Davies, 2008)***

*Performance Indicator #1: Assessment purposes, processes and expected standards of performance are clearly communicated and supported by timely advice and feedback to students*

*Good Practice Statement:* Students receive clear and timely information on the aims and details of assessment tasks; marking and grading practices; expected standards of achievement; and requirements for academic integrity. They are provided with timely feedback on their performance and supported in making improvements.

*Performance measures:*

1.1 Expectations are clearly communicated

*Trigger questions:*

- a) Are the learning outcomes and graduate qualities of the subject clearly communicated to students?
- b) Are the learning outcomes and graduate qualities of the course/program clearly communicated to students?
- c) Are students given clear and timely advice in writing on the aims, types and weightings of assessment tasks (e.g. in subject outlines)?
- d) Are the assessment and marking processes, including how the individual marks contribute to the final grade, explained to students in forums where they can ask questions?
- e) Are all students (onshore and offshore and irrespective of mode) given opportunities to understand how to correctly reference sources and avoid plagiarism, in line with university policies, e.g. on academic integrity?

1.2 Advice and feedback are provided

*Trigger questions:*

- a) Are examples of assessment performances used to demonstrate required standards of academic achievement so students can learn what is expected of them and monitor the quality of their work?
- b) Do students receive constructive feedback on performance on assessment tasks in a timely manner and to support them in making improvements?
- c) Are students given instruction and proactive support for team/group work?

*PI #2: Assessment practices and processes are fair, reliable and valid and produce marks and grades that represent sector/disciplinary standards.*

*Good Practice Statement:* Assessment tasks are comparable across sites and free of bias. Outcomes are open to review. Tasks test the achievement of the knowledge and skills required to meet sector/disciplinary standards. Marks and grades reflect the level or standard of each student's achievement.

*Performance measures:*

2.1 Practices and processes are fair

*Trigger questions:*

- a) Does the faculty/school ensure that assessment tasks are comparable across sites and cohorts (onshore and offshore and irrespective of mode)?

- b) Does the approach to first year assessment support student transition to successful university study?
- c) Do assessment practices accommodate the needs of equity students, e.g. through providing a range of assessment methods?
- d) Does the faculty/school coordinate assessments across subjects, e.g. to avoid repetition of task types, avoid overloading students at particular times and ensure appropriate coverage of learning outcomes?
- e) Are processes in place to appeal against a mark or have it reviewed in a timely manner?

2.2 Assessment is reliable and valid

*Trigger questions:*

- a) Are assessment tasks aligned with learning outcomes?
- b) Are assessment tasks aligned with graduate attributes/qualities?
- c) Are grades moderated between members of teaching teams or other relevant colleagues, including across sites?

2.3 Marks and grades: (1) represent the level of achievement by students; and (2) reflect sector/disciplinary standards

*Trigger questions:*

- a) Do the marks or grades allocated for group assessment tasks reflect the achievement of each student?
- b) Does the faculty/school ensure that assessment is testing for a level of learning commensurate with the year/level of study?
- c) Are explicit marking criteria and explicit standards of achievement used in making judgments about student achievement?
- d) Do staff compare standards [expected of students] with colleagues at other institutions?
- e) Do faculties/schools monitor grades across subjects to identify anomalies and ensure consistency in assessment practices?

*PI #3: Assessment policies and practices are developed, implemented, reviewed and improved in accord with quality principles*

*Good Practice Statement:* Assessment policies and procedures are developed, implemented and reviewed with reference to good practice in the sector and under the oversight of the Academic Senate. Policies and procedures are communicated to and adopted by teaching staff and professional development is provided to support the improvement of assessment practices.

*Performance measures:*

3.1 Policies and practices are developed and implemented within a quality system

*Trigger questions:*

- a) Does the faculty ensure that University assessment policies and procedures are communicated to and adopted by teaching staff, including casual teaching staff?
- b) Are professional development opportunities and resources made available to staff at all levels (e.g. workshops, conferences, relevant literature) to assist them to improve university assessment practices?

3.2 Policies and practices are reviewed and improved

*Trigger questions:*

- a) Does the faculty review assessment practices to ensure they are validated by observed learning outcomes?
- b) Does the faculty review assessment practices to ensure they are aligned with disciplinary and professional standards?



- c) Does the faculty review assessment practices, to ensure that assessment tasks contribute to developing the overall graduate qualities for the course/program?
- d) Is there a comparison of plagiarism and other academic misconduct data related to assessment of students in different locations and/or modes of delivery?
- e) Do staff use feedback from peers and students and other opportunities to share good practice and improve assessment practices?

**Appendix 2: Extract from Assessment Benchmarking Self-review Template**

Performance measure	Rating1 [Place an X in the most relevant column]				Rationale [Use dot points to identify practices that support this rating]	Cite evidence [Provide name and web reference, data sources]
	Level 4 (Yes)	Level 3 (Yes, but)	Level 2 (No, but)	Level 1 (No)		
<b>1.1 Expectations are clearly communicated</b> Consider in rating and address in rationale: a) Are the learning outcomes and graduate qualities of the subject clearly communicated to students? b) Are the learning outcomes and graduate qualities of the course/program clearly communicated to students? c) Are students given clear and timely advice in writing on the aims, types and weightings of assessment tasks (e.g. in subject outlines)? d) Are the assessment and marking processes, including how the individual marks contribute to the final grade, explained to students in forums where they can ask questions? e) Are all students (onshore and offshore and irrespective of mode) given opportunities to understand how to correctly reference sources and avoid plagiarism, in line with university policies, e.g. on academic integrity? f) Other issues? <b>RATING AGAINST 1.1:</b>						

1. Ratings for the performance measures were assigned between Level 4 and Level 1 as follows:

<b>Level 4</b>	<b>Yes ...</b>	Effective strategies are implemented successfully across the faculty
<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Yes, but ...</b>	Good strategies are in place; some limitations or further work needed
<b>Level 2</b>	<b>No, but ...</b>	This area has not yet been effectively addressed, but some significant work is being done across the faculty or institution
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>No ...</b>	No effective strategies are in place, e.g. not addressed, addressed only in isolated pockets, notionally addressed but major barriers to implementation

## Academic Integrity Standards: A Preliminary Analysis of the Academic Integrity Policies at Australian Universities

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### Abstract

*As academic integrity is fundamental to assessment practices, it is critical that it is dealt with consistently by staff and taught to students. How a university defines academic integrity in its policy will affect the way it is taught and embedded in the curriculum. While Australian universities all have policy, teaching and learning practices, decision making and review processes relating to academic integrity, these aspects do not always align in a way that reflects a shared understanding of standards of academic integrity, either at intra or inter-university levels. This paper reports on the preliminary findings from the first stage of an ALTC funded project, Academic integrity standards: Aligning policy and practice in Australian universities set to conclude in June 2012. This project seeks to develop a shared understanding across the Australian higher education sector of academic integrity standards with the aim of improving the alignment of academic integrity policies and their implementation. During Stage 1, the project team members analysed the publicly available online academic integrity policies of 39 Australian universities. Our study found that while a significant proportion of academic integrity policies have a punitive element in their approach, a similarly significant proportion of universities do provide an educative approach and/or attempt to frame their policies with a broad commitment to academic integrity. We have also found that the majority of academic integrity policies fail to make a clear statement of responsibility of the University for academic integrity. These findings have implications for Australian universities' efforts to create a shared understanding and commitment to academic integrity standards.*

**Keywords:** academic integrity, policy analysis, academic integrity standards

## ***Introduction***

A study of the academic integrity policies from Australian universities reveals much about the range of understandings of and commitment to academic integrity in the Australian higher education sector. The complexity and importance of academic integrity has become a widely discussed and researched topic in Australasia (Bretag & Mahmud, 2009; East, 2009; Green, Williams & van Kessel, 2006; McGowan, 2008), North America (Bertram Gallant, 2008; Howard & Robillard, 2008; McCabe, 2005) and Europe (Carroll, 2002; Macdonald & Carroll, 2006). Academic integrity breaches are most often associated with student plagiarism. Grigg (2010) conducted a comprehensive review of plagiarism policies at the 39 Australian universities and found that even within this one aspect of academic integrity, there is wide variation across the sector. However, academic dishonesty may also include cheating in exams or assignments, collusion, theft of other students' work, paying a third party for assignments, downloading whole or part of assignments from the Internet, falsification of data, misrepresentation of records, fraudulent publishing practices or any other action that undermines the integrity of scholarship and research.

In this research project, although the focus is on student breaches of academic integrity, we use the broad definition of academic integrity as follows:

Academic integrity is about mastering the art of scholarship. Scholarship involves researching, understanding and building upon the work of others and requires that you give credit where it is due and acknowledge the contributions of others to your own intellectual efforts. At its core, academic integrity requires honesty. This involves being responsible for ethical scholarship and for knowing what academic dishonesty is and how to avoid it. (University of Tasmania, 2010)

Academic integrity policy documents should ideally enshrine core principles such as honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility (Center for Academic Integrity, 2010). We interpret these principles to be standards of academic integrity and maintain that they need to be embedded in the curriculum implicitly as learning outcomes, or explicitly as assessment marking criteria (e.g. students' own work, independent research, acknowledgement of sources). While the principles need to be upheld in policy, they also need to be enabled in practice via teaching and learning activities and formative feedback on the success or otherwise of student's academic writing, as well as administrative processes that respond to breaches of academic integrity. The focus of this process can vary depending on the contextual interpretation of the procedures relating to the policy at a particular university, as either educative or punitive. Some research shows that a positive, encouraging and educative policy is likely to persuade adoption of academic integrity in students more than punitive and threatening practices (Carroll, 2002; Bertram Gallant, 2008).

Aligning policy, practice and process is important for teaching and learning, for a university's reputation and the value of its research outputs. Students can be concerned about inconsistent standards, and they can fear arbitrary or even unjustifiable punishment for errors (see Breen & Maasen, 2005). Teaching staff can also be concerned and even cynical when decisions about breaches of academic integrity are not appropriately and consistently administered (Lim & Coalter, 2006).

Our ALTC project will (1) investigate the range of Australian universities' academic integrity policies and practices, (2) identify examples of good practice in responding to breaches of academic integrity as well as instances where inconsistencies between policy and practice might usefully be addressed, (3) develop exemplars of good practice that can be adapted across a range of learning, teaching and policy contexts, and (4) provide teaching and learning resources to enable universities to foster a culture of academic integrity that will both pre-empt breaches, and in the case of misconduct, ensure consistent and clear responses.

This paper is aligned with the Australian Quality Forum 2011 theme of 'Quality' with the sub theme 'Defining and achieving standards'. The paper provides detail of the first stage (policy coding and

analysis) of the project, and includes some preliminary findings which have implications for Australian universities' understandings of and commitment to academic integrity standards.

### ***Research Methodology***

The first task in our 18 month project has included analysing publicly available online academic integrity policies at each of the 39 Australian universities. We first had to identify and locate the appropriate policy at each of the universities (not a simple task when many universities often have multiple, related, overlapping but not always linked or updated policies), and do a preliminary coding based on the literature, with particular attention to Grigg's 2010 doctoral work on Australian universities' plagiarism policies, and our own experience.

Grigg (2010) found that information relating to student plagiarism could be located across a vast range of policy documents. For the purpose of this project we applied a simple rule to analysis: We located what we determined to be the *main* document relating to academic integrity, and then only looked further for relevant additional documents if embedded links to them were provided in the original policy. Unlike Grigg we did not explore every document that potentially included information relating to academic integrity. In addition to being constrained by such pragmatic issues of time and resources, the rationale for this decision was that other stakeholders (in particular, students) would be unlikely to seek out related documents that were difficult to find or access.

As a team we were each allocated a specified number of academic integrity policies to code, with at least two coders responsible for every policy. We then teleconferenced issues or points of dispute, revisited our allocated policies to check codes, and then the Project Leader and Project Manager collated and further refined all responses into one Excel spreadsheet. A total of 20 preliminary categories were used in the analysis that included, for example, the purpose of the policy, approach or 'spirit' of the policy, key terms, statement of the responsibility of key stakeholders, identification of what constitutes a breach, penalties for a breach, recording of breach data and confidentiality of any records.

In the next stage of the analysis, the team identified 12 academic integrity policies that could be potential exemplars. It was noted that while some policies did have a number of positive elements such as a strong overarching statement/purpose, clear and consistent message and a focus on education, they were not necessarily included in the shortlist. The positive elements of policies not shortlisted were noted in the analysis table for the 39 policies.

As a consequence of team discussion and further review, two new elements were included for analysis: (1) consideration of context, mitigating circumstances and factors integral to the breach; and (2) 'enabling implementation' i.e. procedures, resources, modules, training, seminars, and professional development to facilitate staff and student awareness and understanding of policy. For each potential exemplar policy, a summary of the policy, its strengths and weaknesses and a rating on a five point scale was also provided by two coders for each policy, and then further checked by the Project Leader and Project Manager, with the result that five exemplars were identified. These five exemplars will provide the basis for the practical resources that will be developed as one of the major outcomes of the ALTC project.

### ***Results and Discussion***

Our study found that although 20 of the 39 policies on academic integrity (51% ) had 'misconduct' and the same percentage had 'plagiarism' as one of the key terms, a large minority (16/39 or 41%) of the policies had 'academic integrity' as a key term. These findings concur with Grigg who found that the most commonly used term for universities' plagiarism policies was 'misconduct' (Grigg 2010, p. 54). However, it is apparent that an ideological shift is gradually taking place. Many universities are beginning to focus less on the negative, punitive side of the issue, and are starting to place more emphasis on instilling positive scholarly values in students (see for example, Twomey, White & Sagendorf, 2009). It might be argued that when discussing plagiarism it is inevitable that the focus will be on 'misconduct'

because plagiarism is generally perceived to be a breach of student academic conduct guidelines. By simply reframing the policy so that it focuses on what is *right*, rather than what is *wrong*, the spirit of the policy can take a dramatically different and more positive direction. As Davis, Drinan and Bertram Gallant (2009) convincingly argue, this reframing, as part of the “institutionalisation of integrity” has the potential to alter levels of cheating and other academic misconduct.

To analyse the approach of academic integrity policies, our study categorised the integrity policies according to the approach or ‘spirit’ of the policy: whether to punish, educate, minimise risk, or develop integrity. As Table 1 illustrates, 41% of the AI policies were framed by a commitment to the positive value of integrity and/or education. Alternatively 21% of the AI policies had an obvious punitive approach.

**Table 1: Approach of academic integrity policy**

Approach	N=39	%
Integrity	15	38
Mixed (Punitive & Educative)	11	28
Punitive	8	21
Risk management	4	10
Mixed (Integrity & Educative)	1	3
Total	39	100

Interesting to the research team was the finding that 28% of policies had a mix of both educative *and* punitive elements. We were fascinated to read policies that may have begun by talking about the need to educate students about appropriate acknowledgement practices, for example, but then proceeded to take a very punitive approach when students had breached those guidelines. Similarly, some policies had stern and apparently punitive titles, but when read in their entirety, clearly provided a strong educational framework with many opportunities for students to learn from their mistakes. Such mixed messages have important ramifications for the way that academic integrity is perceived by students and staff, and the way that breaches are dealt with by teachers, administrators and academic integrity decision-makers. We were also interested to note that 10% of policies were primarily focussed on risk management (that is, safeguarding the university’s reputation). We argue that this position is unlikely to result in fewer academic integrity breaches, and in fact has the potential to drive the issue underground and therefore remove the possibility of developing academic integrity through pre-emptive teaching and learning strategies.

We also categorised the policies according to which academic integrity stakeholders were identified as being responsible (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Responsibility statement in academic integrity policy**

Stakeholder group	N=39	%
Staff and students	14	36
University, staff and students	14	36
Students	8	21
Staff	2	5
Everyone*	1	3
Total	39	100

\*includes university, staff and students and any person, either inside or outside the university

We found that students were mentioned in 95% of policies, while staff were mentioned in 80% of the policies. The institution of the university was identified as being responsible for academic integrity in only 39% of all policies. In 21% of policies only student responsibilities were detailed, with no mention made of the complementary staff responsibilities. When Australian academic integrity policies make students the major (and sometimes the only) stakeholders in upholding academic integrity, there is the potential for other stakeholders such as teaching, administrative and senior management staff not to take responsibility for creating and upholding a culture of integrity on campus.

Bertram Gallant (2008, p. 11) maintains that academic integrity needs to be viewed “beyond student conduct and character to the teaching and learning environment”. Similarly, the Asia-Pacific Forum on Educational Integrity (2010) uses the term ‘educational integrity’ in an attempt to encapsulate a “multidimensional commitment to the key values of honesty, trust, equity, respect and responsibility, and the translation of these values into action by all those in the educational enterprise, from students to parents, instructors and administrators” (APFEI, 2010).

Research by Hall (2006) and Yeo and Chien (2005) suggests that penalties for academic integrity breaches are not consistent across Australian universities. However, many university policies fail to include even basic information relating to types of breaches and their associated outcomes/penalties. Grigg found that even in policies specifically dealing with plagiarism, only 82% had a definition of plagiarism in their policy document (Grigg 2010, p. 61).

In our study, only 44% of the policies provided detail relating to the severity of academic integrity breaches by classifying them, for example, as major/minor, or according to levels or frequency. The majority of policies (56%) did not provide this distinction, putting all academic integrity breaches, most of which were not defined adequately, into one category. Furthermore, in 18% of policies, the outcome or ‘penalty’ for a breach of the policy was not stated at all.

If universities’ policies do not clearly define the various types of academic integrity breach and their associated outcomes/penalties, it is not surprising that both staff and students are often confused about the academic integrity requirements at their universities. Our preliminary analysis concurs with previous research by showing that there is inconsistency in the way that Australian universities present information about academic integrity and how they say they will respond to breaches.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has provided a glimpse of the preliminary findings from our ALTC project, *Academic integrity standards: Aligning policy and practice in Australian universities*. Our analysis of academic integrity policies from 39 Australian universities indicates that while there has been a move away from a negative and punitive approach to a positive focus on integrity, more needs to be done, particularly in relation to policies with mixed messages. Our preliminary findings also point to the need for academic integrity policies to clearly indicate responsibilities for all academic integrity stakeholders, from an institutional perspective and beginning at the highest level (senior management), to teaching and professional staff and students. We maintain that academic integrity is not solely a student issue or responsibility. Finally, our preliminary analysis has concurred with previous research which has suggested that there is inconsistency in the way that academic integrity is both represented and responded to in university policy. The examples of good practice which are currently being identified will provide the basis for policy exemplars which will have the potential to influence future iterations of academic integrity policies in Australian higher education. It may be the case that not any one policy is an exemplar in its own right, and that a final exemplar is likely to be a combination of exemplary elements from a number of academic integrity policies.

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## **Managing Risk in the Non Self-Accrediting – Higher Education Provider (NSA-HEP) Sector**

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### **Abstract**

*There are two intertwined themes in this paper. The first theme, the management of risk in NSA-HEPs, is grounded in the AUQA reports to March 2011. The second theme reflects the policy settings that frame an approach to risk management. The draft TEQSA bill affirms the primacy of a risk-based approach to higher education regulation. Clear conceptualisation of risk is a prerequisite to any consequent discussion relating to a new TEQSA framework for risk assessment.*

*The AUQA approach to academic risk is grounded in the Australia/New Zealand standard on risk management. However, the audit reports of NSA-HEPs refer only minimally to academic risk, and more extensively to operational and management risks, including the requirement for risk management itself. In the new regulatory environment, there will need to be an increased focus on compliance risks and the reputational risks which may affect not only an individual institution but also Australia's higher education system as a whole.*

**Keywords:** academic risk, regulation, risk management

### **Introduction: Risk Management in Higher Education**

The Bill to establish the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) affirms the primacy of “risk management” in the revised framework for Australian tertiary education, ranking this alongside “regulatory necessity” and “proportionate regulation” (Table 1). A review of the first 20 AUQA audit reports for non self-accrediting higher education providers (NSA-HEPs) indicated that risk management was a recurring theme as an element of governance (Winchester, 2010). In the 35 NSA-HEP audit reports published to mid-March 2011, eight specific recommendations relate to risk. The following is a typical recommendation:

AUQA recommends that within its Risk Management Framework ... Institute adopts an explicit risk management strategy for higher education with particular reference to governance structures and external academic input.

The risk management theme has assumed a new prominence in the transition from AUQA, with its prime responsibility for quality audits, to TEQSA and its designated responsibility for standards. This is apparent in the following excerpt from the exposure drafts of the enabling legislation:



**Table 1: TEQSA's approach to regulation (Australian Government, 2011)**

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency's (TEQSA) approach to regulation will be proportionate and risk-based. Part 2 of the Bill establishes three 'basic principles for regulation'. These three basic principles with which TEQSA must comply are:

- a) the principle of **regulatory necessity** – this means that in exercising its powers, TEQSA must not burden the higher education provider any more than is reasonably necessary
- b) the principle of **reflecting risk** – this means that in exercising its powers, TEQSA must have regard to a range of factors, including the provider's history of scholarship, teaching and research; its students' experiences; its financial status and capacity; and its history of compliance with the Act
- c) the principle of **proportionate regulation** – this means that TEQSA must exercise its powers in proportion to any non-compliance, or the risk of future non-compliance, by the provider.

Together, these principles underpin TEQSA's risk-based regulatory approach which will take into account the scale, mission and history of each provider.

TEQSA's focus will be on higher risk providers, allowing higher quality, lower risk providers to operate without unnecessary intrusion.

The NSA-HEP audit reports raise expressions of concern in relation to testamurs and plagiarism; risk in human resources practice and records management; institutional partnerships and academic risks. In contrast there is only one commendation and four positive comments by AUQA about awareness of and management of risk in those 35 NSA-HEPs. This is not intended to suggest that risk management is problematic in all NSA-HEPs. Risk management is also a concern in other education sectors. The new policy emphasis on a risk-based regulatory approach as well as the scale, mission and history of the NSA-HEPs invites our analysis and discussion. Consistent with the principle of regulatory necessity, the intended outcome of this discussion, developed around the NSA-HEP sector, is to lighten the burden on all higher education providers.

Risk is a complex and emotive term, with meanings that have changed through time. The term has common use meaning, as well as a current technical definition. We adopt the current technical definition, risk as the 'effect of uncertainty on objectives' rather than an everyday meaning of risk as exposure to adverse consequences including loss or injury (Ramirez, 2008). While the technical meaning subsumes a negative connotation it also acknowledges the opportunity to chart a new course of action (Australian Institute of Company Directors, 2009). Effective risk management is positive when used to support the strategic objectives of a NSA-HEP and is embedded in daily institutional practice.

We find it useful to differentiate between two risk streams. The first, academic risk is the provenance of AUQA. The second, operational risk encompasses strategic and financial risk, as well as complex compliance risks in relation to legal frameworks such as occupational health and safety, copyright, intellectual property and the Education Services for Overseas Student (ESOS) Act. While this paper emphasises the former, in practice NSA-HEPs, and the sector more generally, are also deeply engaged with the latter. This suggests the need to conceptualise risk so as to include both its academic and operational aspects in higher education. Such a conceptualisation of risk builds on the debate at last year's Australian Quality Forum (AuQF) contributed to by Brewer and Walker (2010) in a paper concerned with strategic and operational risk; by Towers et al. (2010) in a paper concerning a risk-based approach to course quality assurance and by Baird (2010) in an award-winning workshop on the risk management theme.

### ***Higher Education Risk Management Practice in Australia***

The practice of regulatory authorities such as AUQA and TEQSA may contribute to better conceptualisation of risk within the NSA-HEP sector. The current AUQA Framework for Risk Assessment was developed at the express request of AUQA's Members, the Ministers of Education of Australia and its states and territories. Appendix D of the *AUQA Audit Manual, Version 8* is a Framework for Risk Assessment, developed "after considering the definition of risk in the Australian/New Zealand

Standard on Risk Management” (2011, p. 91). *The Australian/New Zealand Standard ISO 31000:2009: Risk management – principles and guidelines* establishes the national standard for risk management in higher education. The Standard defines risk as “the effect of uncertainty on objectives”. The focus of the AUQA framework is academic risk—the achievement of academic objectives. AUQA audits are also concerned with operational risks and the compliance environment, but the current apparent emphasis is on academic risks. The TEQSA Bills indicate a more encompassing view of risk, including aspects of the compliance regime.

The International Risk Standard ISO 31000:2009 influences the sector not only in its adoption by AUQA to discuss academic risk, but also because that definition underpins compliance risk in the corporate sector more generally. (Refer Appendix below for the Principles of organisational risks from the Standard). The Standard is widely adopted by industry and business, thus affecting any higher education provider at several levels. Use of the Standard is reflected in university websites. The following example condensed and paraphrased from Australian university websites is intended to illustrate university practice in that sector:

Formal Risk Management is a systematic process concerned with identifying, analysing, evaluating and treating the uncertainty associated with any activity, process, function, product, project, service or asset. ... Effective Risk Management is not an extra or an add-on, but rather a hallmark of good management and quality decision-making.

Risk Management is not about eliminating risk, it's about managing it. It's about knowing what the risks are and making decisions with our eyes wide open. It's about maximising opportunities and dealing with uncertainties.

This example illustrates an overarching concern to manage enterprise risk as a core function of university governance; itself a subject for further research. It is clear that whereas in the Australian university sector there is normally a “risk and audit committee” (or equivalent) of the governing Council responsible for oversight of risk management, and a corresponding operational resource accountable for implementation of policy, this formal arrangement is less apparent in the NSA-HEP sector. We do not identify this as a problem, rather as a step in the development of the institute or college in the NSA-HEP sector. As a comparison, a report from the USA, *The state of enterprise risk management at colleges and universities today* found that “Sixty per cent of respondents said their institutions did not use comprehensive, strategic risk assessment to identify major risks in mission success” (2009, p. 1). This report refers to the “new language of risk”, identifying strategic, financial, operational, compliance, and reputational risk as areas for the attention of the USA College President and Board. The statement invites comparison of Australian practice in the NSA-HEP sector against the North American example.

### ***The Management of Risk in NSA-HEPs***

AUQA has been auditing the NSA-HEP sector since 2006 at an accelerating pace and to mid-March 2011 had published 35 audit reports. Analysis of the first twenty audit reports revealed a number of areas for improvement including corporate governance, academic governance, benchmarking, human resource management and assessment and moderation (Winchester, 2010). Risk management is an element of corporate governance and is a key role for the Board of Directors.

Risk is mentioned positively in only three of the 35 audit reports. Two institutions have positive comments (but not commendations) about their awareness “of the risks involved in not maintaining academic standards”, and another institution receives positive comments for having a Risk Management Plan and a strategy for diversifying risk. The only commendation related to risk is for an NSA-HEP which has a risk management framework managed by its Board.

While one might expect the audit reports to focus on academic risk, in fact many observations are not couched in those terms, and more are concerned with a range of operational matters. A few comments in the audit reports adopt the common use meaning of risk. They consider that a particular activity or omission may constitute an exposure to danger. For example, in one institution risk is mentioned in relation to testamurs and plagiarism, and in others, in relation to staff lacking position descriptions or concerns over staff workload. However, in both these cases and in many others, the focus of such concerns is essentially about academic risk, although not necessarily phrased as such. Institutions which are not guarding their testamurs or whose staff are unclear about their roles or overburdened with multiple tasks pose an academic risk, i.e. a risk to the achievement of the institution's academic objectives. This suggests the need for conceptual clarity about the meaning of risk, so that auditors can be aware of the scope and the limitations of their commentary.

The academic risks identified in these reports are concerned with admission and delivery standards: notably academic admission requirements and English language proficiency; as well as elements of course delivery such as inappropriate levels of credit and multistreaming, where students enrolled at a number of AQF levels are co-taught in the same classroom. Other academic risks that have been identified are concerned with educational partnerships, especially where those partners may be financially insecure and/or operating within other jurisdictions. A further academic risk noted in only one report, but which applies to many, is the risk posed by dependence on one small service company for the supply and maintenance of major IT student systems. In one institution, the report comments that the Academic Board could play a more significant role in the management of academic risk. In another institution, a formal urgent recommendation is for that institution "to incorporate educational partnerships and academic risk into its risk management framework, and that the Risk Register includes specified actions to prevent or act on risks". This is indeed the only recommendation which makes specific mention of academic risk.

Therefore, despite AUQA's expected focus on academic risk, most of the recommendations do not use this terminology and are about operational or management risk, in particular how the NSA-HEPs recognise and manage risk. Six of the eight recommendations on risk to date are about operational or management risk, while one is on academic risk, and one on strategic risk. In addition, there are numerous comments and suggestions about operational risk throughout the audit reports. The main concerns of these recommendations are for the NSA-HEPs to develop or improve risk management frameworks, to establish or update risk registers, and for the Council or Board of Directors and its appropriate sub-committees to oversee the risk management framework and policy. A representative recommendation is one for an institution to, "develop a risk register, including the development of appropriate oversight by the Board of Directors for the management of risk and the implementation of a risk assessment process."

Two other types of risk are mentioned. One is a strategic risk, where an institution's growth strategy was seen as overly dependent on factors and partners beyond its control. The other is a compliance risk in relation to significant legislation or legal frameworks, for example, the adequate protection of intellectual property, or compliance with the *AQF National Policy and Guidelines on Credit Arrangements* (Australian Qualifications Framework, 2009). In a number of cases, compliance with the *National Protocols (Provider Standards)* might itself be in question, particularly in relation to governance and the appropriate composition, experience and activities of the Board of Directors.

### ***Reappraising Risk Management***

There are two themes in this paper. The first, the management of risk in NSA-HEPs, is grounded in the AUQA reports. The second theme is our reflection on the policy settings that frame the approach to risk. At a time when TEQSA is developing a revised framework for academic risk it seems appropriate to acknowledge these policy settings. This paper supports the benefits of a risk-based approach in education management. Research and scholarship, core educational activities for higher education providers, albeit on differing scales, invite risk. Aside from academic risk, the high concentration of people, groups of students and staff in a knowledge precinct, whether campus or CBD building, industry placement or

human research site contributes to operational risk, including the risk of disastrous events as discussed by Brewer and Walker (2010). The conduct of education as a business mandates a rigorous corporate compliance regime, acknowledging the financial responsibilities of the provider, and the requirements for consumer protection. Further, the adoption of a risk-based approach by any one institution is of direct interest to the sector as a whole, in particular because of the dangers of reputational risk.

Damage to the reputation of any one institute, college or university may affect Australian education more generally. The DEEWR Overview Report *International Student Survey 2010* notes that “Reputation of the institution” and “Reputation of a qualification from the institution” are two of the top four reasons a student selects that institution. The Universities Australia report *The International Student Barometer Project 2010* indicates that for international university students, the most important factor when choosing Australia is the reputation of the education system. Within an increasingly competitive national system reputation will also influence the selection of providers by domestic students. While the tertiary entrance score may continue to dominate entry into certain courses and institutions, in the emerging higher education system the power shifts to those students who, subject to meeting minimum entry requirements, can select between courses and providers. As a consequence, students may take discretionary funding to their institution of choice. Within this environment, effective risk management to protect the reputation of the system as a whole is the responsibility of each higher education provider as it maintains its own reputation.

### ***Conclusion: A Time for Clarity***

Risk and risk management are not the same. While risk represents an unknown, which may be fearful; risk management suggests a process to identify and mitigate the unknown. That process can be confronting. As Baird reminded us in AUQA’s risk management workshops (2010, quoting Donald Rumsfeld from 2002) there are unknown unknowns. Risk management is unfinished business, a process that requires monitoring and organisational commitment. We argue that conceptual clarity is important when considering risk management, and that the contemporary industry definition, widely adopted by the university sector, warrants the attention of the NSA-HEP sector.

It is apparent that the transition from AUQA, originally conceived as an agency to work with the universities and state regulators to address institutional quality assurance, to TEQSA, a regulatory agency with a remit that includes the standards of national higher education, is a significant change in higher education regulation. Monitoring standards that establish minimum levels of attainment consistent with accreditation represents a shift in emphasis from working with providers engaged in continuous improvement through a quality assurance process.

The evidence from the NSA-HEP reports suggests that conceptual clarity around risk is not only an issue for the NSA-HEPs but also for the regulating body. The audit reports regularly conflate or confuse academic with operational risks. TEQSA as the new regulator will also be concerned with compliance risks. Clarity of understanding of the risk environment will help mitigate reputational risk for the higher education sector.

Our consideration of these matters led us to conclude that the major potential risk to any provider and to the sector as a whole is reputational risk. In as much as Australian education is an international endeavour, establishing and maintaining the international reputation of the national authority is of prime importance. An important legacy of AUQA is the international reputation of the Australian education system and its quality assurance processes.

We conclude that a responsibility of the regulatory body is to establish an appropriate risk management framework that differentiates between operational and academic risk, and continues to represent national quality assurance as international best practice.

The separate endeavours of each provider to manage risk, within the framework established by the national regulator are a complex, integrated project of national significance. Education then, is our collective risky business.

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### Appendix: Principles of Organisational Risks

(Standards Australia (2009) AS/NZS ISO 31000:2009. *Australian/New Zealand Standard™ Risk management—Principles and guidelines*. Sydney: Standards Australia. pp. 6–7)

1. Risk management creates and protects value
2. Risk management is an integral part of all organizational processes
3. Risk management is part of decision making
4. Risk management explicitly addresses uncertainty
5. Risk management is systematic, structured and timely

6. Risk management is based on the best available information
7. Risk management is tailored
8. Risk management takes human and cultural factors into account
9. Risk management is transparent and inclusive
10. Risk management is dynamic, iterative and responsive to change
11. Risk management facilitates continual improvement of the organization.

## Issues in Risk Analysis

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### **Abstract**

*The regulation of non self-accrediting higher education institutions (NSAIs) is viewed as a system comprised of regulator and regulated entities. Four main areas of risk are identified in the system: reputational issues, quality assurance, managing people and organisations, and compliance with legislative and regulatory requirements. The analysis focuses in detail on reputational issues and compliance.*

*Specific risk factors are analysed in terms of the estimated associated risks (after treatment) to the efficient and effective functioning of the regulation of non self-accrediting higher education. The analysis is guided by the Australian/ New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 4360:2004, Risk management approach to risk analysis and risk management whereby risk is measured in terms of the likelihood of an event occurring and its consequences.*

*It is argued that reputational issues are the most important, with responsibility shared equally between the regulator and regulated entities. Compliance issues are more variable, and it is argued that effective management of compliance should involve a greater emphasis on proportionality in regulatory actions and responses, and targeting of areas of high risk.*

*Effective risk management requires 'buy in' to the system by regulated entities, on the basis that the regulatory system works in their overall best interests. While the regulator needs to maintain an effective monitoring regime and some controls and sanctions should remain, a mix of regulatory instruments is likely to produce the most effective results.*

### **Overview**

The regulation of higher education in Australia involves a distinction between self-accrediting universities and non self-accrediting higher education institutions (NSAIs). The universities are established under legislation in the various states and territories and have reporting obligations back to the relevant legislature. State and Territory Government Accreditation Authorities (GAAs) are responsible for the regulation of the Australia wide system of around 130 separate non self-accrediting higher education institutions. Approval of NSAIs is soon to be transferred to the new Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA).

The analysis of risk in the regulation of non self-accrediting institutions (NSAIs) is somewhat different to the usual scenario for risk analysis in organisations, where the focus is on the risk to a particular organisation or business entity. While from a legal perspective business risk management is the direct responsibility of the institutions themselves, the regulatory authority also has a vested interest in encouraging institutions to have effective risk management strategies in place. The GAA is in a sense responsible for the corporate governance of the system as a whole, where the system is more than the sum of its individual parts.

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<sup>1</sup> The views in this paper are those of the author and do not represent the views or practices of the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority.

In order to optimise the level of risk in the system as a whole, the GAA must ensure that high risk institutions are not approved in the first place and it must develop and act on policy and regulatory settings which reward effective risk management and identify and penalise poor risk management by institutions.

Taking a system perspective, four main areas of risk have been identified, expressed as groupings of related issues, which are explored in further detail below:

1. Reputational issues
2. Quality assurance
3. Managing people and organisations
4. Compliance with legislative and regulatory requirements

Specific risk factors are identified within each of the above areas. The analysis opens the way to integrate the key risk factors into a single framework and identify the parties responsible for managing the various risks. The operation of higher education institutions in a market economy can create an ongoing tension in the sector, at least for some institutions, between delivering education to high academic standards and maintaining a profitable enterprise. This is not considered a risk as such, but rather as part of the risk management context.

Reputational issues group a number of risk factors and there is a sense in which reputation is a more general, overarching concept. The higher education system is analogous to a complex business entity with many different stakeholders and decision makers. In many cases potential overseas students select Australia (or other countries) as their preferred study destination based on a range of issues, and then consider the institution where they will study. If Australia's reputation is damaged in some way, they are more likely to go elsewhere. As with a business, reputation can play a crucial role in determining stakeholder behaviour. Rayner argues that 'risk to reputation', together with financial risk, are the two most important factors affecting a large, well-known business entity. (Rayner, 2003, p. 20)

Much learned discourse and complex mathematical analysis has been devoted to risk analysis and risk management, particularly as it applies to the finance sector, to complex project management, and to fields of human activity involving the handling of hazardous materials and the like, however, the basic idea of risk management is in essence simple:

Risk means being exposed to the possibility of a bad outcome.

Risk management means taking deliberate action to shift the odds in your favour – increasing the odds of good outcomes and reducing the odds of bad outcomes.

As Borge argues, we are dealing with uncertainty every day, and our approach to dealing with risks will be heavily influenced by the context within which we operate and by individual attitudes as to the possibility or likelihood of a bad outcome occurring. (Borge 2001, p.4) There is also the matter of the anticipated severity of the outcome – if the consequences are regarded as manageable, then a higher likelihood of a bad outcome might be tolerated; whereas if the consequences are going to be catastrophic, efforts must be made to reduce the likelihood of the bad outcome. As the AS/NZS Standard notes, 'risk is measured in terms of a combination of the consequences of an event ... and their likelihood.' (AS/NZS Standard 4360:2004, p. 4)

The AS/NZS Standard notes that 'risk may have a positive or negative impact.' The goal of risk management is not to 'minimise risk' in a general sense, as that involves limiting initiative and cutting off opportunities to develop worthwhile and successful business activities. Rather, the goal should be to achieve the best possible balance between opportunity and risk. (Borge 2001, p. 69) This wider view of risk forms part of the background in this analysis, which must nevertheless focus on limiting the



likelihood and the impact of negative outcomes. As new opportunities arise, Government regulators will naturally lag behind the entrepreneurs, but it is important that dialogue and consultation is maintained.

The underlying assumption is that regulatory authorities and NSAs are both part of the same system in which views of regulator and regulatees about what constitutes acceptable risk need to be broadly compatible. It is in the general public interest for both to arrive at an operational consensus as to how the overall risk management system should operate. In this light risk management becomes 'embedded' in organisations and stakeholders 'take responsibility for risks in their area of activity'. (Rayner, 2003, p. 57)

The four main areas of risk noted above in the system of regulation of non self-accrediting higher education institutions have been analysed in terms of **the estimated associated risks (after treatment) to the efficient and effective functioning of the regulation of non self-accrediting higher education**. A qualitative rather than quantitative approach to the likelihood of risk events, or bad outcomes, is adopted. There is no attempt to quantify probabilities numerically, as there is currently insufficient data to support serious quantitative analysis.

Risks associated with areas 2 and 3 above, quality assurance and managing people and managing people and organisations, are primarily located with the institutions offering higher education. Examples are:

#### Quality assurance:

- Academic governance not sufficiently independent of management
- Australian Qualifications Framework requirements not maintained
- Academic staff not engaged in scholarship and research
- Course review processes inadequate and courses not updated
- Quality improvement processes weak
- Benchmarking lacking or inadequate
- Comparability of courses with universities not maintained
- Information management inadequate

#### Managing people and organisations:

- Inadequate qualifications and/ or experience of academic staff
- Academic standards may slip under financial constraints
- Overuse of sessional and/ or part time academic staff
- Staff professional development lacking or inadequate
- Student services and student support inadequate
- Student records management inadequate.

The risks associated with the above have been identified as low after treatment, assuming initial compliance and ongoing monitoring and compliance.<sup>2</sup> This is because an increase in risk involving individual elements is unlikely to seriously affect the broader regulatory system.

Risks associated with areas 1 and 4, reputational issues and compliance with legislative and regulatory requirements, are broader in nature and relate to stakeholder and public *perceptions* of individual institutions and of the system as a whole, and its effectiveness in ensuring that good quality education is delivered to students and that acceptable standards are being met.

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<sup>2</sup> The one exception is that in the case where an institution closes, the risk associated with inadequate student records escalates rapidly.

Reputation of the system:

- Poor performance with minimum standards not adhered to
- NSAI outcomes below university outcomes
- Possible institution failure
- Unfavourable media coverage
- Regulatory failures by GAAs
- Lack of transparency in operations of GAAs
- Opposition to regulation by stakeholder organisations

Compliance with legislative and regulatory requirements:

- Inadequate monitoring of compliance
- Failure to notify major changes
- Inadequate (annual) reporting
- Non compliance with conditions of registration
- Inadequate sanctions and/or enforcement
- Inadequate monitoring of offshore delivery
- Poor communication between regulatory authorities and institutions

This paper focuses on risks related to the reputation of the system as a whole and to compliance with regulatory requirements. Key areas of risk are presented in summary form, with some further refinement of the risk identification and proposed treatment. For each risk the body bearing primary responsibility is identified by a code:

R = Regulator's responsibility

I = Institution's responsibility

An estimate is then made of the risk after treatment relating to each area. The findings are preliminary estimates, to be further refined in consultation with stakeholders.

***Reputational Issues***

The reputation of Australian private higher education is a key component in what is now a major export industry. The reputation is based on several intersecting components:

- establishment and maintenance of minimum standards of education delivery as monitored by regulatory authorities
- appropriately qualified teaching staff, well versed in the requirements of their discipline
- a good standard of 'client service' in terms of resources, facilities and educational opportunities for students
- a regulatory system wherein non self-accrediting institutions are required to maintain educational standards which are comparable to those at universities.

The 'brand value' of institutions is supported and enhanced by the values of the regulatory framework in which they operate. The 'brand value' of the Australian higher education is in turn dependent on the reputation of the individual institutions which make up the system.

The rapid development of the non self-accrediting higher education sector in the past ten to fifteen years has played an important part in the growth of higher education in Australia. NSAI's have introduced a

greater degree of flexibility into the system, particularly through the advent of niche institutions offering a range of courses and diversity of specialist disciplines not generally available in the universities.

Table 1 presents some preliminary analysis of risks relating to reputational issues:

**Table 1: Reputational risks**

Issue		Proposed treatment	Associated risk
1.1 <b>I, R</b>	Poor performance by institutions with minimum standards not adhered to in teaching, resources, facilities or student services.	Ensure standards are maintained, particularly at initial approval, and to monitor ongoing compliance.  Work with stakeholder organisations to assist in maintaining standards	<b>Medium</b>  Depending on the success of risk treatment. Incidence and impact are unpredictable.
1.2 <b>I, R</b>	Perception that NSAI standards do not match those of universities.	As above  Use monitoring procedures to check that NSAIs are benchmarking against relevant university courses.	<b>Low-medium</b>  Depending on the success of risk treatment.
1.3 <b>I, R</b>	Institution may collapse financially and leave students out of pocket. Students rank as unsecured creditors in the event of bankruptcy	Monitor solvency and compliance with requirement to protect student fees	<b>Low likelihood</b> <b>High impact</b>
1.4 <b>I, R</b>	Media discussion of perceived institution or system failings may further damage the system	Ensure requirements on entry to system are sufficiently robust and there is 'buy in' from institutions.	<b>Low-medium</b>  Incidence and impact are unpredictable.
1.5 <b>I, R</b>	Court action relating to de-registration may damage system. [De-registration decisions in may be challenged and overturned.]	Ensure there is evidence to back court proceedings to improve chances of success in court.	<b>Low-medium</b>  Depending on circumstances.
1.6 <b>R</b>	Inability of GAAs to regulate effectively	GAAs should operate to established standards and be subject to periodic audit	<b>Low-medium</b>  Depending on resources and oversight arrangements.
1.7 <b>I, R</b>	Poor performance by NSAI with ESOS Act and National Code requirements involving overseas students not adhered to. Possible serious reputational damage and impact on enrolments if breaches are widely publicised.	Monitor ESOS compliance, which is separate from HE regulatory requirements.	<b>Low-medium likelihood</b> <b>High impact</b>  Depending on circumstances.
1.8 <b>I, R</b>	Poor performance by institutions delivering offshore with minimum standards not adhered to in teaching, resources, facilities or student services. Overseas regulatory requirements not adhered to. Possible serious reputational damage and impact on enrolments if breaches are widely publicised.	Monitor offshore delivery standards (further work needed)  Ensure that foreign government regulatory requirements are met.	<b>Low-medium likelihood</b> <b>High impact</b>  Depending on circumstances.

Overall, the highest risks are estimated to be associated with this area. Any system is only as strong as its weakest link, and an inadequate, or poorly performing institution, can readily weaken the reputation of the regulatory system as a whole by casting doubt on the effectiveness of the system in maintaining

minimum standards. Some areas have the potential for high impact, even where the likelihood of an adverse event may be low, with the capacity to escalate in the event of extensive media coverage.

Reputational risks are seen as a key area where responsibility is shared between institutions and GAAs. Poor performance or unethical practices on the part of a small number of providers will damage the system as a whole and confidence can quickly disappear if the reputation of particular institutions, or of the system itself, is damaged. Effective management of reputational risk depends on positive communication and engagement by regulators and regulatees, with support from stakeholder organisations.

It is incumbent on GAAs to ensure that organisations approved to operate as higher education institutions meet the requirements for initial approval and maintain the capacity to provide higher education programs of an adequate standard. Therefore it is important for a monitoring process to be in place which can provide relevant information on provider performance from an academic, organisational and business perspective.

### ***Compliance with Legislative and Regulatory Requirements***

Approval of NSAI is based on a peer review process, whereby panels of suitably experienced academics scrutinise applications for registration of higher education institutions and for accreditation of their courses. Approvals are for a limited period, and re-registration and re-accreditation processes are required every five years. Monitoring arrangements currently vary somewhat between jurisdictions, with the main emphasis being on an annual reporting process. Table 2 presents some preliminary analysis of risks relating to compliance:

**Table 2: Risks associated with non compliance**

Issue		Proposed treatment	Associated risk
4.1 <b>R</b>	Compliance is not monitored adequately. Lack of GAA resources, or incorrect risk analysis.	Strengthen monitoring arrangements.	<b>Generally low</b> Potential to be medium to high in exceptional cases
4.2 <b>I, R</b>	Failure to notify major changes.	Strengthen monitoring arrangements. Also clarify requirements around major changes.	<b>Low-medium</b>
4.3 <b>I (R)</b>	Inadequate annual reports or failure to submit annual reports. Is usually an indication of a stressed or poorly run institution	Should trigger specific follow up action, possibly a site visit or audit.	<b>Medium</b>
4.4 <b>I (R)</b>	Non compliance with conditions or reporting requirements imposed. Is usually an indication of a stressed or poorly run institution.	Should trigger specific follow up action, possibly a site visit or audit or, in the last resort, suspension or de-registration.	<b>High</b>
4.5 <b>R</b>	Inadequate sanctions and/ or enforcement in response to serious non compliance	GAAs should have sufficient enforcement powers and resources	<b>Low-medium</b> Depending on legal powers and resources.
4.6 <b>I, R</b>	Inadequate monitoring of standards with offshore delivery. Number of institutions currently involved is small.	Strengthen monitoring arrangements. Review required to establish best mechanism, possibly on a 'user pays' basis.	<b>Low-medium</b> Depending on circumstances.
4.7 <b>I, R</b>	Poor communication between NSAI and GAA. May be an indication of a stressed or poorly run institution, or lack of GAA resources, or incorrect risk analysis.	Improve communication channels e.g. workshops, information sessions, newsletters, etc.	<b>Low</b>

The levels of risk associated with the above areas are mixed and responsibility for compliance is shared between institutions and the GAAs. While institutions have the primary responsibility to comply with requirements of their registration and course accreditation, GAAs also have the responsibility to ensure that compliance requirements are consistent and transparent. In addition, GAAs have a responsibility to have adequate monitoring mechanisms in place and to communicate effectively with institutions. The incidence of (known) non-compliance is relatively low, but when cases arise, it is important for GAAs to be quick to respond.

It is important for the regulator to ensure that there is effective 'buy in' to the system by regulated entities, which will only occur if they accept that the regulatory system works in their overall best interests. While some sanctions should remain, a mix of regulatory instruments is likely to produce the most effective results. Informal sanctions and peer group attitudes are likely to be at least as effective as formal sanctions. (OECD 2000, pp. 75–76)

In developing a more sophisticated approach to compliance, it is important to note that the Australian Standard sees compliance as an activity internalised within an organisation:

Compliance is an outcome of an organisation meeting its obligations. Policies and procedures to achieve compliance must be integrated into all aspects of how the organisation operates. Compliance should not be seen as a stand alone activity, but should be aligned with the organisation's overall strategic objectives. (AS 3806-2006, p. 4)

The OECD report on compliance suggests that inadequate compliance underlies many instances of regulatory failure. The report argues that actions to promote regulatory compliance must take into account the degree to which the target group:

- knows of and comprehends the rules
- is willing to comply, whether via positive attitudes and acceptance of the rules, or via incentives, or pressure from enforcement
- is able to comply with the rules. (OECD 2000, p.7)

Regulators have a responsibility to ensure that regulated entities are aware of the requirements of the regulatory system and maintain positive attitudes towards it. Ultimately regulatory systems with low levels of voluntary compliance will fail. Effective management of compliance cannot rely on an approach based on ensuring that regulations are obeyed; the approach needs to be more persuasive and cooperative in orientation.

A useful framework for further analysis of compliance issues is the T<sup>11</sup> 'Table of Eleven' key determinants of compliance developed in the Netherlands, which can be used to assess the likely effectiveness of proposed regulatory changes.

According to T<sup>11</sup>, regulatory design is optimal where the regulation is simple to implement and produces a maximum level of spontaneous compliance. If T<sup>11</sup> analysis shows that spontaneous compliance is insufficient and cannot be improved in certain areas, then additional controls and sanctions may need to be added in that area to guard against breaches and lead to a reasonable level of compliance. (OECD 2002, pp. 78–80)

Spontaneous, or voluntary, compliance factors are: knowledge of rules, cost benefit considerations, level of acceptance, normative commitment and informal control by third parties. Control factors include various scenarios of detection of non compliance through audit, poor risk profile or whistle blowing. Beyond that, sanctions factors relate to the possibility of sanctions being imposed and the severity of those sanctions.

The UK Better Regulation Commission has published a thought provoking paper, *Risk, Responsibility and Regulation*, in which it argues that

- zero risk is unattainable and undesirable
- any intervention should clearly specify the risk that is to be managed, the objective to be achieved and the reason why state intervention is considered the optimum risk management solution ...
- any intervention should be targeted on those who are most at risk.

(UK Better Regulation Commission 2006, p.38)

### **Conclusion**

The current regulatory framework is based on legislation (currently State based), regulations, protocols and guidelines. There is scope for expanding the framework to include consideration of two regulatory principles that are specifically related to risk assessment and achieving appropriate outcomes: *proportionality* in regulatory actions and responses, and *targeting* of areas of high risk. Proportionality is important in that 'Regulators should only intervene where necessary. Remedies should be appropriate to the risk posed...' Targeting is important in that 'regulation should be focused on the problem and minimise side effects.' (UK Better Regulation Task Force, 2003, pp. 4–6)

In further elaborating and prioritising the analysis and treatment of risk it is proposed to take into account operational guidance available in the Standards Australia handbooks *Governance, risk management and control assurance* (2005) and *Delivering assurance based on AS/NZS 4360:2004 Risk Management* (2006). In treating and managing risk, the main focus should be on risk mitigation (reducing the likelihood and severity of risk events), risk reduction (reducing the severity of risk events, if not their frequency) and risk avoidance/prevention (reducing the likelihood of engagement with risk events), together with consideration of situations where risk acceptance is appropriate. (Davidson-Frame, 2003 Chapter 8)

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## Development of “Self-directed” College Ranking and its Impact on Taiwan Students’ Choice and Institutional Policy Making

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### Abstract

*Over the last decade, the number of international students has become one of the key indicators for assessing the level of internationalism of institutions. In order to help students make well-informed choices, reliable national and international college ranking systems with comparable information about higher education institutions worldwide have been welcomed by many international students. Because traditional college rankings had many methodological problems, a new type of user-based ranking, called “personalized college ranking” started to develop in many nations in the late 1990s.*

*Higher Education Evaluation & Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT), a leading quality assurance agency of higher education, has taken responsibilities for providing students more transparent information about college and universities in Taiwan. In 2008, HEEACT initiated a 2-year research project called “College Navigator in Taiwan” which developed a student-based college search engine to provide local and international students with transparent information on Taiwan’s higher education institutions. The main objective of this paper, therefore, is to outline the rational, strategies and pathways for establishing a personalized college ranking called “College Navigator in Taiwan” by HEEACT and its impact on students’ selection over a school to study and institutional policy making.*

**Keywords:** higher education, personalized college ranking, quality

### Introduction

Over the last decade, the number of international students has become one of the key indicators for assessing the level of internationalism of institutions. In order to help students make well-informed choices, reliable national and international college ranking systems with comparable information about higher education institutions worldwide have been welcomed by many international students. Due to the fact that traditional college rankings have many fatal methodological problems which could not be solved at present such as the arbitrary selection of indicators and weightings, undefined users and simplistic presentation, etc., a new type of self-directed ranking, called “personalized college ranking” started to develop in many nations in the late 90s.

Up to now, there are 8 major personalized college ranking systems established either nationally or regionally. The first personalized college ranking called “University Ranking” was published by Centre for Higher Education Development in Germany in 1998. There have been 7 such systems published after 2000, including Canadian Maclean’s “Personalized Ranking Tool” in 2006 and GlobeMail in 2007, Holland “Studychoice.nl, British The Times’ “Push” in 2007, Forbes’ “Do it yourself ranking”, U.S. National Center for Education Statistics’ “College Navigator”, and HEEACT’s “College Navigator in Taiwan”.

Higher Education Evaluation & Accreditation Council of Taiwan, a leading quality assurance agency of higher education, takes responsibilities for providing students more transparent information about college and universities in Taiwan. Though HEEACT publishes accreditation outcomes and the final reports on its website each year, not many users could fully understand the information. In 2008, HEEACT initiated a 2-year research project called “College Navigator in Taiwan” which developed a student-based college search engine to provide local and international students with transparent information on Taiwan’s higher education institutions. The main objective of this paper, therefore, is to outline the rational, strategies and pathways for establishing a personalized college ranking called “College Navigator in Taiwan” by HEEACT and its impact on students’ selection over a school to study and institutional policy making.

### ***The Rationale for College Rankings***

With the rapid expansion of higher education and a surge in the number of universities since the 1990s the era of marketization has officially begun. Universities are beginning to be held accountable towards stakeholders in the same way as the private sector businesses enterprises are. As higher education institutions continued to marketize, they are expected to be more responsible to their stakeholders by disclosing assessment outcomes in public. Zumeat (2005) indicated that colleges and universities face unprecedented external demands and this shift in states’ expectations and relations with colleges and universities is significant not only for academe’s own interests but for important societal values (cited in Schmittlein & Berdahl, p. 74).

Academic rankings and league tables that create data transparency are regarded as an important instrument for the evaluation of quality in higher education institutions (Muller-Boling & Federkeil, 2007). Hence, rankings are inevitable in the era of massification, those who finance higher education and the public want to know which academic institutions are the best (Altbach, 2006). According to Sadlak (2006), the former Director of UNESCO-European Centre for Higher Education, ranking, which can be defined as an established approach, with corresponding methodology and procedures, for displaying the comparative standing of whole institutions or certain domains of its performance, is now fast becoming a worldwide phenomenon (p. 3). It is being done for a variety of reasons, such as providing the general public with information, fostering healthy competition among higher education institutions, stimulating the evolution of centers of excellence, and offering an additional rationale for allocation of state funds (Sادلak, 2006). As Merisotis (2002) has clearly noted, whether or not colleges and universities agree with them and whatever their outcomes, it is now an accepted component of an external tool for quality assurance. To conclude above, ranking systems are clearly here to stay due to accountability and marketization in higher education.

Major changes are taking place in higher education all over the world. Rising competition has prompted higher education institutions to take internal steps to increase their attractiveness in the marketplace and create more visible external profiles. In order to become strong players in the global knowledge-based society, colleges and universities are taking advantage of rankings to establish the benchmarks that will help them develop strategies to achieve these goals. Hence, performance indicators and benchmarks in rankings are used by university leaders to make informed choices for strategic development and to enhance their international competitiveness (CHE & CHEPS, 2008; Hou & Morse, 2010).

At present, college rankings have become one of the ways for universities to prove to the public and prospective students that their products and services are worth investing in, and this inevitably leads to severe competition among universities (Stella & Woodhouse, 2008). Thus, the increasing number of college and university rankings published by commercial magazines, academic institutions, or government agencies has become a manifestation of the new competitive higher education environment and a driver of change.

### ***Pitfalls, Criticism and Self-improvement***

Yet, rankings continue to have a controversial role and arouse fierce debates among rankers, institutions and users even though they have gained legitimacy from society, government and students. In fact, there



are several problems and pitfalls in current global and national college rankings, including the arbitrary selection of indicators and weightings, undefined users and simplistic presentation (Aguillo, Ortega, & Fernandez, 2007). To analyze the methodologies of the current global and national rankings, there are four kinds of problems (Hou & Morse, 2009)

1. Indicators of learning output or final outcome are not often taken into consideration: Usher & Savino (2006) divided indicators of quality into seven categories, including reputation, research output, learning input (staff & resource), learning output, final outcome and student quality. In fact, most rankings only include learning input and research output without considering learning output or final outcomes.
2. Distribution of indicator weightings is too arbitrary: The weights used in the methodologies are determined arbitrarily by rankers. However, some rankings do not even explain why the criteria are weighted that way. For example, QS has no explanation for the use of 10 % for international outlook in its methodology. Also, the U.S News and World Report and Maclean's adopt the same indicator of student/ faculty ratio but with 5% and 10% weightings respectively.
3. Sources of data are not credible. Basically, there are three sources of data on institutions, including survey data, independent third parties and university (Usher & Savino, 2006). However, the use of each data source has its problems. Surveys are considered too subjective and university sources are likely be manipulated. As for the public databases such as ESI, they are collected for the specific purposes and are not comprehensive enough for ranking organizations to use.
4. Outcome presentation is too simplistic. Though it is easy for users to realize the performance of each institution by numerical order, it is too simplistic a manifestation of educational outcomes, which will be likely mislead the public to a single concept that the limited number of measure indicators represents overall quality of an institution, which will yield what is called "reductionism" (Neubauer, 2010).

In order to maintain the quality of rankings, the International Ranking Expert Group (IREG) founded in 2004 by the UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education (UNESCO-CEPES) and the Institute for Higher Education Policy, have come up with the Berlin Principles on Ranking of Higher Education Institutions which consist of 16 descriptive principles for the good practice of college ranking regarding four aspects: purpose and goal of rankings, design and weighting of indicators, collection and processing of data, and presentation of ranking results (The 2nd IREG, 2006). According to the 2nd IREG conference, it was expected that the Berlin Principles would set a framework for the elaboration and dissemination of rankings whether they are national, regional, or global in scope that ultimately would lead to a system of continuous self improvement and refinement of the methodologies used to conduct these rankings in order to enhance the transparency and quality of rankings. (The 2nd IREG, 2006). In 2011, *IREG Observatory on Ranking and Excellence* in UNESCO Global Forum announced publicly the audit rules and policy. On a voluntary basis, rankings that pass robust evaluation will be entitled to use the quality label **IREG approved**. The results of the first ranking audits are expected in the fall 2011 (IREG, 2010; ARWU, 2011). At present, the audit process is ongoing, but hopefully it will start to have an impact on the development of existing ranking systems, by successfully driving them to make a self-examination according to these principles.

### ***Higher Education Internationalization and Personalized College Ranking Systems***

Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, globalization has become a powerful force with profound effects on the internationalization of higher education throughout the world. The multifaceted processes and dimensions of internationalization in higher education are "integrating an international dimension into the purpose, goals, functions and delivery of higher education" (Knight, 2007, p. 134). One of the key elements of internationalization is cross-border education. Generally speaking, cross border higher education refers to "student, faculty, institutional, and program mobility" (Daniel, Kanwar & Uvalić-Trumbić, 2009). According to the "Education at a glance" 2010 Report by OECD, there were over 2 million international students in 2010. The United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Australia are the five main destination countries (OECD, 2010). *The Global Student Mobility 2025 Report* predicts that the number of international students will increase to 7.2 million by that year (Bohm et al., 2003). It found that

the growth in overseas study had produced a whole new range of booming destinations for study. Students' preference for the studying location started to change, with a remarkable growth in the number of inbound students to New Zealand, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, the Slovak Republic and the Russian Federation (Chiriliuc, 2010).

Foreign students are a key element of internationalism. Hence, a reliable national or international college ranking system with comparable information about higher education institutions worldwide has become important for international students in order for them to make well-informed choices. However, as mentioned above, owing to methodological problems and a lack of relevance to the need of domestic and international students in many of the league tables or rankings, some groups have launched a non-traditional, student-oriented ranking system called personalized college ranking, that can provide information about universities for students without a well-defined ranking outcome presentation. Different from the classic ranking which presents the problem of one-size fits all, Salmi & Bassett (2009) indicated that personalized college rankings "allow for self-directed comparisons of institutions instead of determining a set rank" (p.2). Gero (2009) clearly stated the strengths of personalized rankings are to "allow the users to construct a ranking that corresponds to his or her individual preferences and priorities". Moreover, the major function of the multi-dimensional rankings just help to identify profiles of institutions by showing their strengths and weaknesses for the users instead of coming up with an ordinal league table.

Generally speaking, personalized college rankings target students as major users, which current league tables do not. They respect users' needs in the selection of indicators and weightings through web-based platforms. The goal of the information system is to lead to a match between the student and the institution or program in which they are most interested. Hence, some have suggested that, instead of the term ranking, an appropriate term for this student information service system would be matching ( Stichting SURF, 2008).

#### *Five Major Personalized College Rankings*

Personalized college rankings started to develop in the late 1990s. Up to now, there are five major personalized college ranking systems established either nationally or regionally. The first personalized college ranking system called University Ranking was published by the Centre for Higher Education Development in Germany in 1998. The other four ones published after 2000 are the Canadian Maclean's "Personalized Ranking Tool" in 2006, the Dutch "Studychoice.nl, and the British Times' "Push" in 2007 and Forbes in 2009. In the CHE University ranking, since 1998, 290 German universities have been included, with more than 300,000 students and around 31,000 professors taking part in the surveys. Programs from universities and from universities of applied sciences are presented separately (German Academic Exchange Service [DAAD], 2007). There are three central methodological principles of the CHE-ranking that distinguish it from traditional ranking approaches. First, it focuses on the purported value of a specific subject or program at a university rather than that for the university as a whole. Instead of calculating an overall value out of single (weighted) indicators, it provides a multi-dimensional ranking in which each indicator is presented separately. In addition, universities are ranked in three groups --top, middle and lower ones (Muller-Boling & Federkeil, 2007).

Maclean's Personalized Tool is an instrument that offers students the ability to select seven indicators drawn from the most recent edition of the Maclean's University Ranking, and then weight them according to their own preference (Maclean's, 2011). How many institutions users select to rank depends on their need. It means users can choose all universities, or select some of them by region, such as universities in the West, Ontario, Quebec or the Atlantic region only. After these three steps, the program will come up with an individual ranking across all of the schools that users select.

The Dutch studychoice 123 is a college selecting tool created under the auspices of the Studiekeuze123 partnership that includes the higher education institutions (HBO-Raad, VSNU and PAEPON) and the students' organizations (LSVb and ISO). The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the

Netherlands is, however, the major financial sponsor for the project. In studychoice 123, users can compare higher education study programs on the basis of 90 criteria, ranging from student views about teachers, contents of the programs, starting salary on graduation to average room rent or number of pubs and bars in the various university cities. Users may choose to separate them or put them together, to consider their choice of programs across the sectors of the higher education system. There are also three steps in making choices for users as Maclean's does (Stichting SURF, 2008). As to the result presentation of each criterion, like CHE, the selected study program is placed in three groups- highest score (green), average score (yellow), and lowest score (red).

The Times' Push is also a new but powerful tool to help students find their ideal university. Through the website, Push, as a university guide with 132 universities, is designed to help students narrow down the choice to a shortlist and put it in their own order of preference by using over 200 criteria (Push, 2008). The most recent one is Forbes' "Do it yourself ranking" just published in 2009. Like other personalized rankings, it customizes the process, allowing users to construct their own list according to personal tastes and preferences (Forbes, 2009). First, users can choose the region and institutional size that suit them, then 12 relevant but different criteria provided will help users find the best schools for them. In addition, general information of the ranked institution will be listed as reference on the result and be sent to users as they requested.

While examining these five rankings according to the Berlin Principles, they all clearly state their purposes and target groups provided with the relevant data, which is consistent with the Berlin Principles 1, 2, 12 and 15. Besides, all rankings empower users to select or weigh criteria, corresponding to the Berlin Principles 7 and 9 as well. In addition, with web-based data, they can correct the errors and faults and update the data quickly. Yet, in the absence of a true audit process, the major concern in these five rankings is still with the quality and consistency of data.

**Table 1: Comparison of 5 major personalized rankings**

	CHE	Maclean	Studiekeuze123 partnership	Times	Forbes
Established year	1998	2006	2007	2007	2009
Nature of Institution	Higher education research center	Mass media	Governmental unit	Mass media	Mass media
Goal	Help students to make a well informed choice on programs	Help students to make a well informed choice On institutions	Help students to make a well informed choice On institutions	Help students to make a well informed choice	Help students to make a well informed choice
Number of indicators	Over 34	13	Over 90	Over 200	12
Indicator category	Research grant / reputation/ learning input and resources. Student survey	Research grant / reputation/ learning input and resources	Student survey / institution	Learning input/ Student survey / institution	Student survey / institution
Data sources	Survey/ database/ institution	Survey/ database/ institution	Survey/ database/ institution	Survey/ database/ institution	Survey/ database/ institution
Presentation	By Indicators/ without overall ranks and scores	By Indicators/ With overall ranks and scores	By Indicators/ With overall ranks and scores	By Indicators/ With overall ranks and scores	By Indicators/ Without overall ranks and scores

Source: by authors

### ***Development of Taiwan Personalized College Ranking***

As a quality assurance agency of higher education, HEEACT takes responsibility for providing students more transparent information about college and universities in Taiwan. Though HEEACT publishes accreditation outcomes and the final accreditation reports on its website each year, not many users could fully understand the information. Hence, two major reasons underlay the study “College Navigator in Taiwan” launched by HEEACT: one is HEEACT acting as a proxy for colleges and universities, and the other is to enhance the international visibility of Taiwan higher education.

### ***Design of Indicators***

Based on 5 major personalized rankings worldwide, HEEACT outlined possible strategies and pathways for establishing a new one for Taiwan higher education institutions since 2008. In the 2-year study conducting, only 69 comprehensive universities and colleges were included. First of all, the ranking group conducted ten focus group sessions to hear prospective college student opinions and to see how the system could be developed in the initial phase. A total of 168 students selected randomly from 10 public and private high schools participated in the focus sessions and filled out survey questions to express their attitude toward more than 30 predetermined indicators of ranking system. In addition to the indicators of the number of SSCI and SCI papers, as the result shown, most respondents felt the remaining indicators provided very important information for them to select a school to study (table 2). After holding the focus group sessions within 6 months, the 4-tiered model of criteria was developed successfully for 69 comprehensive universities, including 11 criteria, 24 indicators, 5 preferences and 20 items (see table 3).

**Table 2: Top 10 indicators that senior high school students feel are very important in college choice**

Indicators	Importance		
	Number	Mean*	Standard Deviation
Equipment expenses per full-time-equivalent student	162	3.65	0.58
Expenditure per student	164	3.61	0.64
Proportion of students abroad	121	3.55	0.64
Number of volumes and volume equivalents per full-time-equivalent student	165	3.49	0.67
Library expenditure per full-time-equivalent student	166	3.46	0.65
Graduation Rate	165	3.44	0.73
Total amount of National Science Foundation grants per faculty	163	3.43	0.72
Total number of English taught courses	164	3.42	0.71
Academic survey	163	3.40	0.66
Faculty-student ratio	165	3.38	0.70

Source: author

\*(1–4 rank)

**Table 3: Model of criteria**

Tier	Content	Number
Criteria	academic survey, student quality, faculty resources , library acquisitions, research grant, research output, teaching quality , learning output, international outlook etc.	11
Indicator	enrollment rate, proportion of graduate students, graduation rate, proportion of faculty members above assistant professors, proportion of professors with a highest degree, proportion of full-time faculty, student/ faculty ratio, total expenditure per student, number of articles published in SCI/ SSCI/ AHCI per faculty, National Science Foundation grants per faculty, proportion of international students, proportion of international faculty, library expenditure per student, number of patents awarded per faculty, etc.	24

Preference	location, size, type, program/ discipline, etc.	5
General information	history, enrollment, number of programs, and website, room and board, student service, accreditation status, governmental grants, scholarship, tuition, student clubs, accommodation, etc.	16

Source: author

Moving into the second stage of the project in 2010, technology universities and technical universities were added into the college navigator based on a similar model and similar criteria. In addition, by holding three expert group meetings, 6 new indicators were developed according to their missions and educational goals, including number of international awards by students, number of patents, number of technology transfer, number of collaborative project between university and industry, total amount of income generated by the collaborative projects between university and industry. In addition, several indicators were recommended to combine and integrate into one, such as number of National Science Foundation research projects in different fields and its total amounts.

#### *Features of “College Navigator in Taiwan”*

Compared to the classic ranking, users of “College Navigator in Taiwan” are given a certain extent of autonomy over selection of indicators and weightings. The process enables users to select the indicators within criteria and weigh each one by their own judgment. In addition, users are able to rank the institutions they are interested in by region, type, size and program. More unranked information on universities that users are likely interested in, such as founding year, mission, and total enrollment, number of programs, and website, accreditation status, government funding, application, room and board, tuition is presented as part of the final ranking outcomes.

“College Navigator in Taiwan” with a consumer-based mission, in fact, should not be viewed a real ranking in the traditional sense. Its key feature is that “the college navigator gives individual users the opportunity to establish their own rankings according to a number of self-chosen criteria. Moreover, the website just gives robust information (distinguishing only top – middle – bottom groups per indicator), like CHE ranking, not spuriously precisely simple and overall ranking” (Hou & Morse , 2009, p. 63).

#### ***Impact of the Ranking on Taiwan Universities and Colleges***

##### *Research Subject and Method*

In order to realize how the system is impacting on Taiwan institutions’ policy making, a survey targeting 69 comprehensive university presidents for their views on the selected subjects in regards to the college navigator system was conducted. All respondents were asked to fill out the 5-scaled questionnaires and present their opinions regarding 6 categories and 24 questions and were asked if the college navigator system was having a great impact on the aspects of the institution, including institutional policy making, staff and faculty recruitment, research output, resource allocation, student services and learning environment, and overall opinion on the use of the system. Overall response rate is 68.12%. First, all questions are simply analyzed by mean and STD, then Histograms and Normal curve are two checking tools to realize how respondents’ attitude toward the questions are distributed on the 5-scale points. If the score of category is higher than 3.5, it represents the positive attitude of respondents toward the questions.

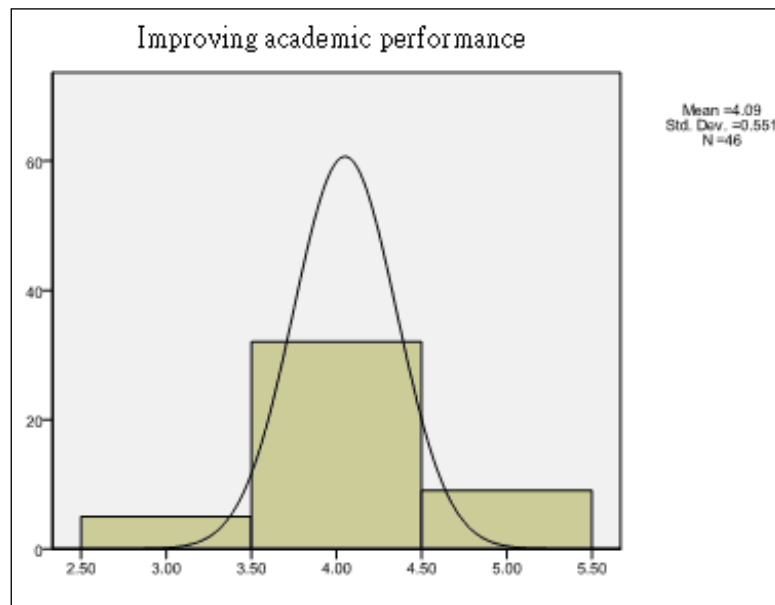
##### *Major Findings*

##### *Results Analysis with Histograms and Normal Curve by 6 Categories*

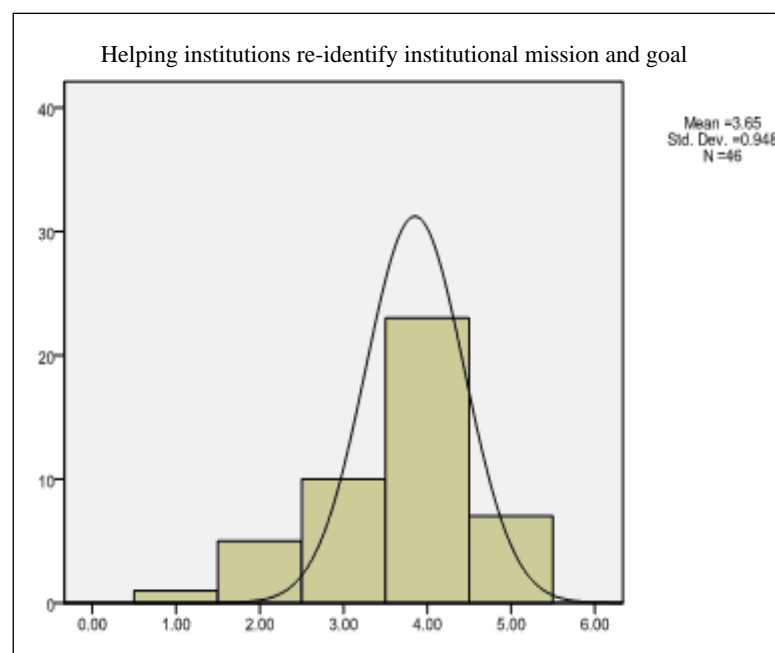
###### **(1) Institutional policy making**

There are four questions in the category of Institutional policy making, including re-identifying institutional mission and goal, driving the institutions to improve academic performance, assisting institutions to realize their strengths and weaknesses, making institutions pay more attention to academic rankings. According to Histograms and Normal curve analysis, it was shown that most respondents tended to agree on these statements positively. “Driving the institutions to improve academic performance” is

higher than other statements with 4.09, compared with 3.65 the statement of “helping institutions re-identify institutional mission and goal” (see graph 1 and graph 2).



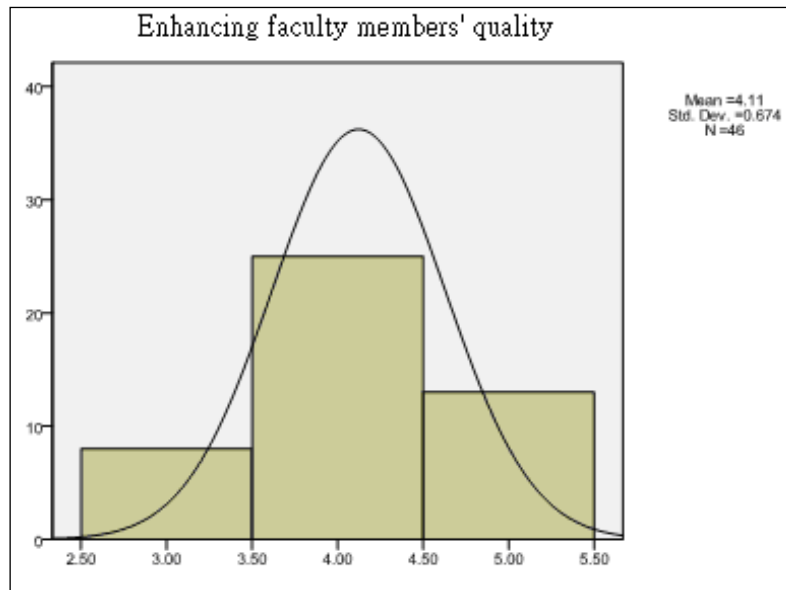
**Graph 1: Histograms of driving the institutions to improve academic performance**



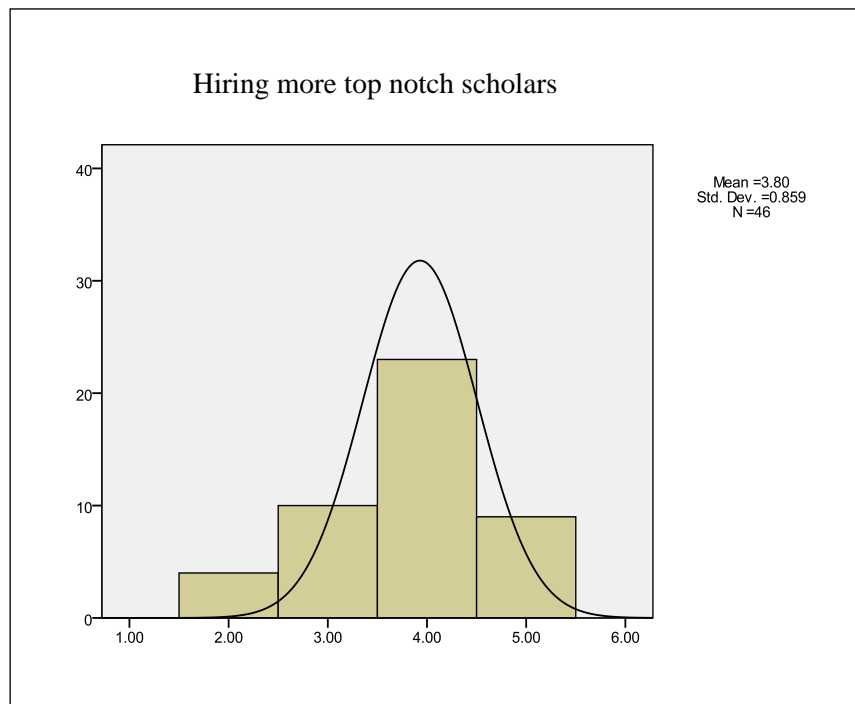
**Graph 2: Histograms of helping institutions re-identify institutional mission and goal**

## (2) Staff and faculty recruitment

There are four questions in the category of Staff and faculty recruitment, including increasing full-time faculty, enhancing faculty members' quality, hiring more top notch scholars, strengthening internationalization of campus. According to Histograms and Normal curve analysis, it was shown that most respondents still tended to agree on these statements positively. Average score of the category is 3.92. “Enhancing faculty members' quality” is higher than other statements with 4.11, compared with 3.80 on “hiring more top notch scholars” (see graph 3 and graph 4).



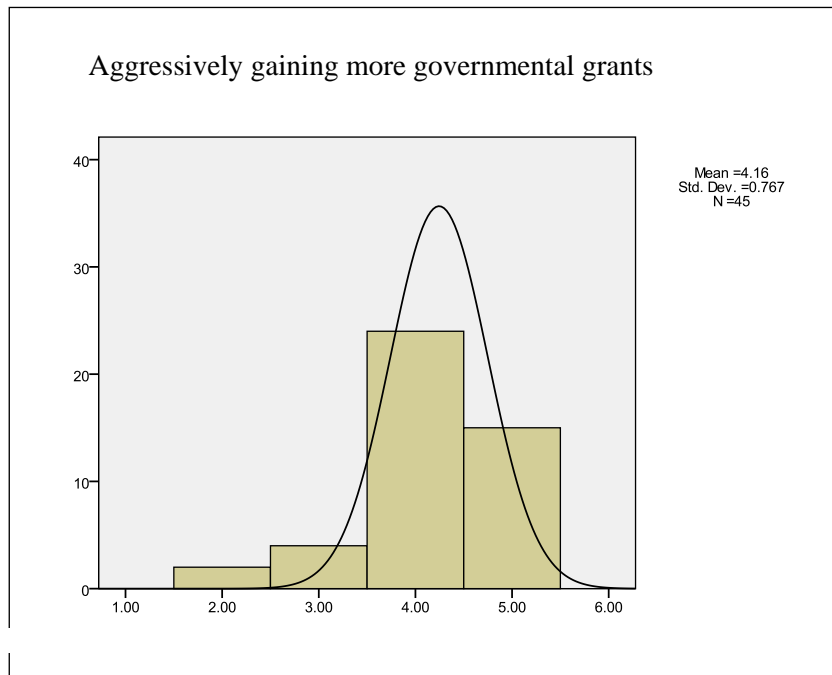
**Graph 3: Histograms of enhancing faculty members' quality**



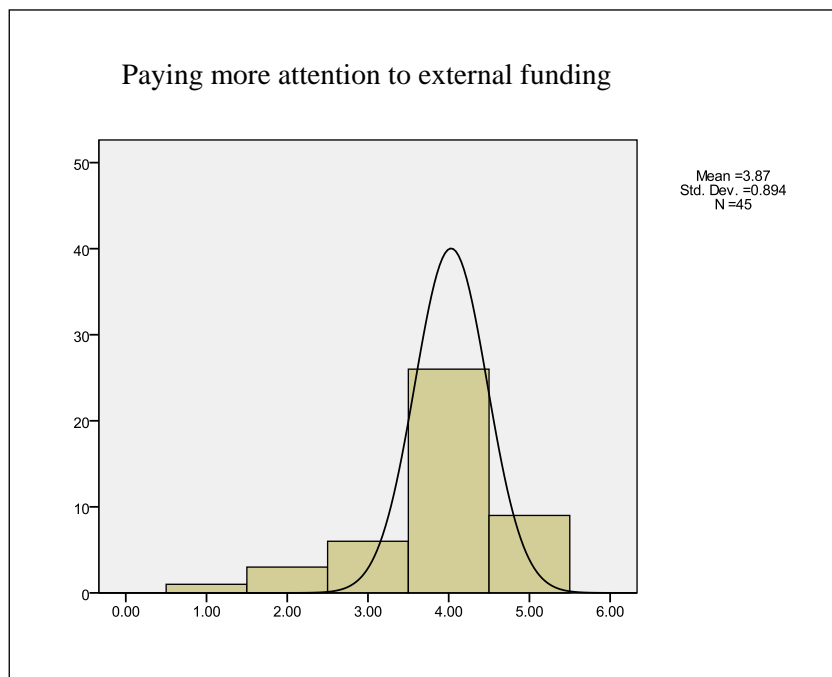
**Graph 4: Histograms of hiring more top notch scholars**

### (3) Research output

There are three questions in the category of Staff and faculty recruitment, including aggressively gaining more governmental grants, paying more attention to external funding, and more emphasis on research output and outcomes of faculty members. According to Histograms and Normal curve analysis, it was shown that most respondents still tended to agree on these statements positively. Average score of the category is 4.04. “Aggressively gaining more governmental grants” is higher than other statements with 4.16, compared with 3.87 on “paying more attention to external funding” (see graph 5 and graph 6).



**Graph 5: Histograms of aggressively gaining more governmental grants**

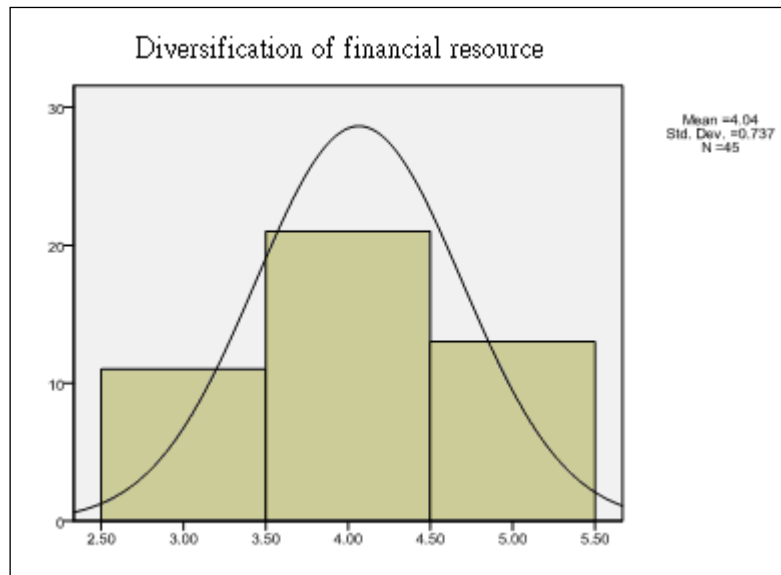


**Graph 6: Histograms of paying more attention to external funding**

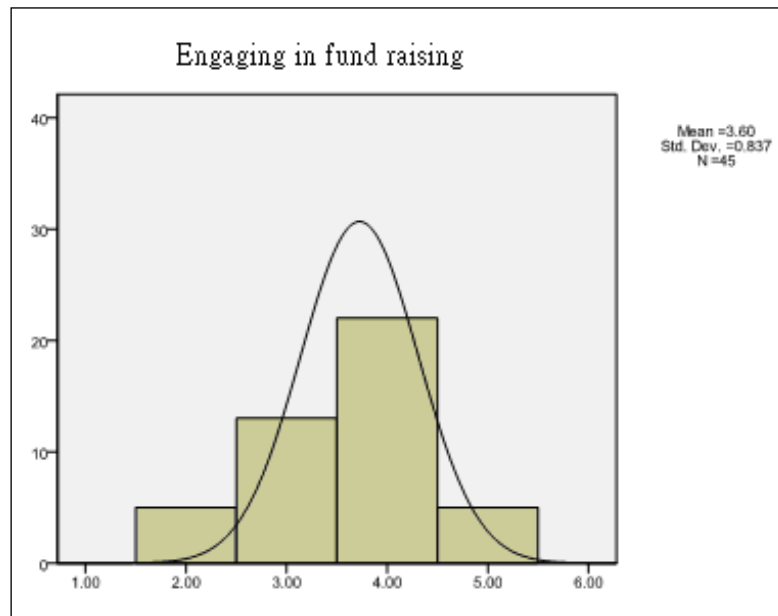
#### (4) Resources allocation

There are only two questions in the category of Resources allocation, including diversification of financial resources and actively engaging in fund raising. According to Histograms and Normal curve analysis, it was shown that most respondents still tended to agree on both statements positively. Average score of the category is 3.82. “Diversification of financial resources” is higher than “actively engaging in fund raising” (see graph 7 and graph 8).





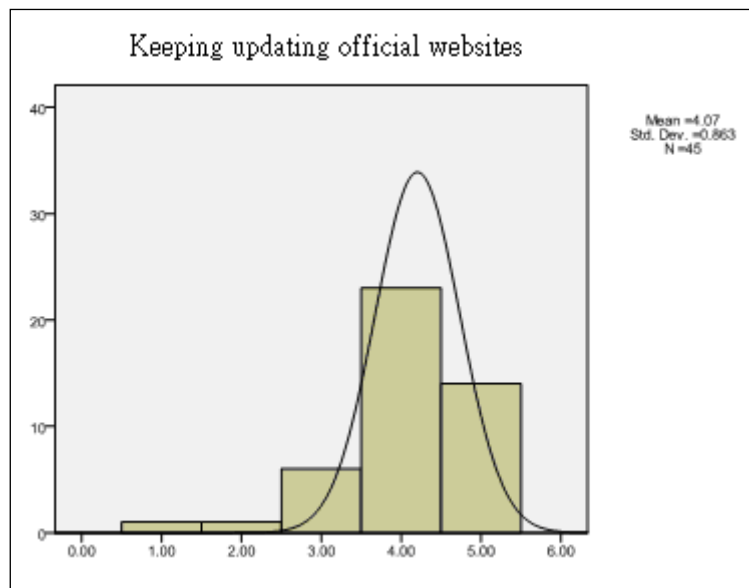
**Graph 7: Histograms of diversification of financial resources**



**Graph 8: Histograms of actively engaging in fund raising**

#### (5) Student services and learning environment

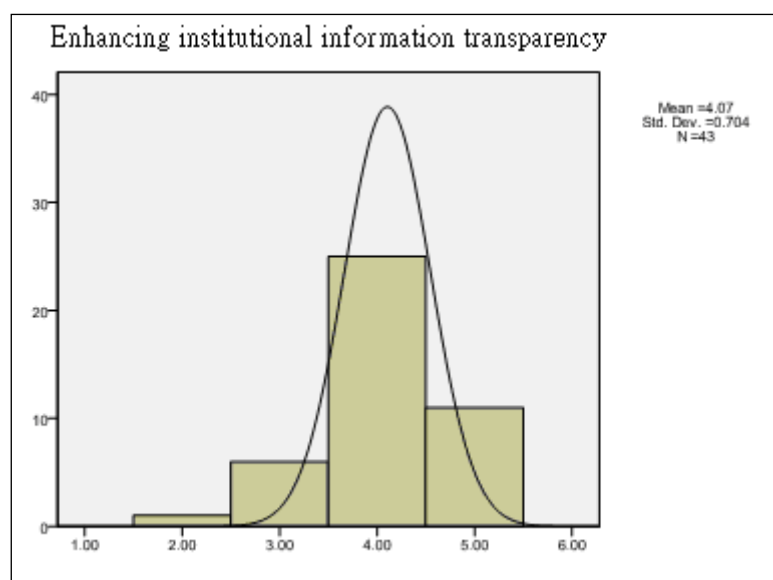
There are six questions in the category of Student services and learning environment, including remaking student recruitment policy, encouraging students to take part in national and international competitions and contests, improving the graduation rate, attracting more international students, paying more attention to student learning outcomes, and keeping updating official websites. According to Histograms and Normal curve analysis, it was shown that most respondents still tended to agree on both statements positively. Average score of the category is 3.85. “Keeping updating official websites” is relatively higher than other statements (see graph 9). Average score of the category is 3.85.



**Graph 9: Histograms of keeping updating official websites**

(6) Overall opinion on the use of the system

There are five questions in the category of Overall opinion, including driving institutions to pay more attention to the educational effectiveness and research development, enhancing institutional information transparency, providing sufficient information with local students, helping local institutions to attract more international students through the English presentation, satisfying varying needs of the users. According to Histograms and Normal curve analysis, it was shown that most respondents still tended to agree on both statements positively. Average score of the category is 3.91. "Enhancing institutional information transparency" is relatively higher than other statements (see graph 10).



**Graph 10: Histograms of enhancing institutional information transparency**

*Overall Statistical Data Analysis*

Generally speaking, respondent's attitude toward all questions is fairly positive and they generally agree that the system has a great impact on the development of universities and colleges in Taiwan. Overall mean score is between 4.1 and 3.5. In addition, the respondents agree most on the category of

“increasing research performance”, with a mean score of 4.06, but a big confidence interval exists among all respondents compared with the other aspects (see table 4).

The result showed that several single items have a higher point: helping enhancement of overall academic performance, promotion of faculty quality, engaging in governmental research funding, emphasis on faculty research outputs and diversification of financial sources, strengthening the content of official website, and increase of transparency of institutional relevant data etc. Among the respondents, few items has a comparably lower score: re-identifying institutional mission and goal, hiring more top notch scholars, actively engaging in fund raising, and improving the graduation rate, etc.

**Table 4: Mean and STD by items**

Categories	Mean	STD	95% Confidence Interval	
			Upper	Lower
Institutional policy making	3.95	0.61	4.14	3.76
Staff and faculty recruitment	3.93	0.67	4.14	3.73
Research output	4.06	0.76	4.30	3.83
Resources allocation	3.82	0.69	4.04	3.61
Student services and learning environment	3.86	0.72	4.09	3.62
System operation	3.93	0.75	4.16	3.69

Source: by authors

#### *Relevance and Difference Among the Attitude of Focus Students, General Users, and Universities*

After the publication of HEEACT ranking in 2009, Taiwan colleges and universities are pressured highly to pay more attention to what students do care about most. More and more schools begin to improve their performance according to the usage number of indicators. Table 5 shows that “academic survey” is the most favorable indicator with more 22,000 usages, followed by “expenditure per student” and “enrollment rate”. Other popular indicators chosen by users also include enrollment rate, average proportion of graduated students, faculty-student ratio, number of national academic awards by students, total NSC grants per faculty, proportion of full-time faculty, and proportion of professors with Ph.D. The fact that most students care more about educational resources, learning environment and faculty quality has been proved.

**Table 5: Top 10 indicators by the number of usage times**

Indicators	Usage times
Academic survey	22030
Expenditure per student	18878
Enrollment rate	14750
Graduate rate	13654
Faculty-student ratio	13645
Number of national academic awards by students	10405
Total library holdings per student	10144
Total NSC grants per faculty	9744
Proportion of full-time faculty	9013
Proportion of professors with Ph.D.	8194

Source: Higher Education Evaluation & Accreditation Council of Taiwan (2011). College Navigator in Taiwan.

[Online] Retrieved August 14, 2010, from <http://cnt.heeact.edu.tw/index2.asp>

When it comes to cross examine the rank difference among focus students, general users, and universities, there was a high level of agreement on the financial resources between focused students and general users. They both agreed highly on the importance of the indicator of “expenditure per student”. On the contrary, institutions thought it in a different way. According to the survey, universities pay more attention to the indicator of ‘research output’ than financial resources and student services or support. In addition, general users ranked “academic survey” as the first place, at the same time, institutions also thought the system would pressure them to improve their ranks in national and global rankings in order to be recognized by students and the public (see Table 6).

**Table 6: Comparison of importance of the indicators among focus students, general users and institutions**

Focus group' opinions	Most popular indicators	Institutions' attitude
Equipment expenses per full-time-equivalent student(moved into general information category )	Academic survey * (higher)	Institutional policy making (Rank 2)
Expenditure per student	Expenditure per student	Resources allocation (Rank 6)
Proportion of students abroad(moved into general information category )	Enrollment rate	Student services and learning environment (Rank 5)
Total library holdings per student	Faculty-student ratio* (higher)	Student services and learning environment (Rank 5)
Library expenditure per full-time-equivalent student (moved into general information category )	Graduation rate* (higher)	Student services and learning environment (Rank 5)
Graduation Rate	Number of national academic awards by students	Student services and learning environment (Rank 5)
Total NSC grants per faculty	Total library holdings per student** (lower)	Resources allocation (Rank 6)
Total number of English taught courses (moved into general information category )	Total NSC grants per faculty** (lower)	Research output (Rank 1)
Academic survey	Proportion of full-time faculty	Faculty Resource (Rank 3)
Faculty-student ratio	Proportion of professors with Ph.D.	

Source: authors

It is obviously seen that “College Navigator in Taiwan” is influencing student’s choice and the institutional policy making. Yet, the gap on their attitude toward the importance of “learning resources” and “research” still exists. Although most users prefer to pick up the indicators of learning input and output, institutions tend to improve the research output first. It is likely that institutions were learning to get used to the new student –based ranking system and remained confused on the purpose of the new system which is not the same as the traditional types.

Most university presidents admitted that the system, to some extent, encouraged the institutions to make great efforts to improve faculty quality, as well as to provide local and international students with more transparent information for school selection. On the other hand, only a few respondents from teaching-oriented type institutions and small schools believed the system could help them attract good students, and some thought it may even hurt their reputation. However, it is foreseen that the more helpful the

college navigator system is for targeted users, the more it will become an issue and concern among Taiwan universities and colleges in terms of how it's impacting them.

### Conclusion

In the 3rd IREG meeting, Mersotis (2007) stated that rankings of higher education institutions have emerged as a major force in what can be characterized as the accountability marketplace for higher education quality. Though it is often argued that educational quality is "really in the eye of the beholder and there are many possible definitions of quality, any single set of rankings will inevitably do an injustice to other definitions of quality", rankings better than accreditation as a convenient heuristic device makes the complexities of academic performance of institutions understandable, providing the public with more precise data (Usher, 2008). The development of personalized college rankings worldwide corresponds to the respect for the diversified quality definition from each user.

All in all, the College Navigator system has drawn attention of institutions in Taiwan and has impacted their policy making, particularly on the enhancement of research output and faculty quality while most students do care more about learning environment and output. At present, HEEACT is expected to keep updating the data of the 69 institutions and 77 Taiwanese universities of technology and technical colleges. The system adopts a dual-track selection approach to facilitate different cohorts of the perspective students. Given the fact that the number of students moving to study in foreign countries is consistently increasing, the ultimate objective of the project is to expand Taiwanese participation based system into an Asian based type. In the long term, more and more Asian universities which intended to attract more international students will be invited to join the system.

To conclude, no matter what type of the rankings is being done or created, the big challenge for those that compile and publish them is to ensure that they can provide accurate and relevant assessments, and measure the right things for target groups. In the future, it can be assured that HEEACT's College Navigator will continuously pressure colleges and universities in Taiwan to improve their academic performance and to provide more information which students need in order to promote quality and international visibility of Taiwan higher education.

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## **Professional Accreditation in Transnational Quality Assurance: A Potential Approach to a Challenging Issue**

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### **Abstract**

*To maintain its world market position, Australia needs to assure the quality of its provision of transnational higher education. Many importers of transnational higher education also find it difficult to ascertain and assure quality in an increasingly complex market. This paper examines one possible approach to the increasingly challenging task facing national authorities and the higher education community in assuring the quality of transnational higher education. Using primary and secondary data from three countries – Australia, Singapore and Malaysia – this paper takes the position that transnational quality assurance needs a transnational perspective. The paper presents finding that suggests accreditation and certification by a professional association can potentially contribute to filling gaps in transnational quality assurance. The paper presents evidence for the increasingly important role of the professional association in safeguarding the quality assurance of transnational higher education that may have resonance for new international higher education markets.*

**Keywords:** quality assurance, transnational higher education, professional association

### **Introduction**

There are many reasons for the emergence and growth of transnational activities in higher education (Currie, 2005; Feast & Bretag, 2005). Historically, transnational higher education began as a developmental initiative through which the more developed countries crossed borders to assist the less developed ones to build their capacity. However, the current emphasis has moved to higher education as a form of trade, where the main focus for the developed countries is on earning income from importing countries. With this increase in trade in higher education, the number of quality-related issues reported has also increased (Kremmer, 2004). This latter increase is partly due to the fact that transnational higher education has become complex in its form and structure and in terms of the number of stakeholders involved. To address the increasing number of quality challenges, there has been rapid development of quality assurance mechanisms.

In Singapore and Malaysia, existing quality regulatory frameworks have proven to be insufficient to govern private education providers offering transnational degrees. This was evident when the impressive growth in Australian transnational education in the 1990s (Kremmer, 2004) in these two countries was accompanied by increasing reports of quality-related issues. The need to address accountability for academic quality and to mitigate the risk of exposure to “low-quality provision and disreputable providers” (Blackmur, 2007, p. 119) subsequently led to an increase in regulatory systems in the 2000s.

Singapore and Malaysia are two of the earliest and largest importers of Australian degree programs (IDP, 2006). Since Australia commenced its offshore activities, the entrepreneurship of private investors, professional associations and family clans in Singapore and Malaysia have resulted in many different partnerships with Australian universities. Collaboration with Australian universities by these two countries started primarily with the simpler form of distance learning and then moved on to twinning arrangements. Twinning, and then franchising, began to occur when the two importing countries matured

with experience and grew stronger financially (Marginson & McBurnie, 2004). Sophisticated forms of transnational degrees have since emerged, combining articulation, distance learning, online teaching and franchising.

### ***Issues of Current Transnational Quality Assurance***

There are many challenges related to governance and the management of quality when degrees cross borders. Australian transnational higher education is commonly offered through franchising and twinning modes via collaboration between Australian universities and private education providers in foreign countries (Marginson & McBurnie, 2004). These private education providers are usually directly governed by their own regulations and indirectly governed by the Australian government via Australian universities. However, most formal quality assurance requirements imposed by the Australian government are particularly vulnerable to non-compliance in overseas locations, partly due to the geographical distances involved.

Many developing countries that are major importers of Australian degrees tend to fall behind their more developed counterparts in terms of quality assurance development (Mok, 2009; Sirat, 2005). Left with little support and regulation from their governments, private education providers have often determined their own goals, measures, and standards to function in a dynamic competitive market. But the market imposes a fundamental constraint. Private education providers provide a service in exchange for revenue. It is thus logical to question how much these institutions are able or willing to maintain quality assurance requirements that pose heavy demands on their resources and thereby reduce their profit.

Some of these issues related to quality assurance reported are beyond the management of the exporting universities, while others, arguably, are under the control of the universities.

One issue is the engagement of unqualified lecturers. It has been reported that commercial schools that offer Australian transnational degree programs have less qualified lecturers than their Australian counterparts (Lim, 2008). As such, academic staff have been concerned that franchising of a degree might lead to a lowering of education quality (Huang, 2006; Jones, 1996). In Malaysia, a 2006 audit commissioned by the government revealed that only 4.5 percent of those teaching at commercial higher education institutions offering degrees had PhDs (Chok, 2006). While it is debatable whether there is a correlation between possessing a research degree and being able to teach well (Boddy, 2007), many believe that research experience will provide teachers with updated knowledge that can contribute to better teaching (Durning & Jenkins, 2005; Boddy, 2007).

A second related issue is the lower qualifications of offshore lecturers engaged to deliver the transnational degree than those of their Australian counterparts. In the 2008 AUQA audit report (Stella & Liston, 2008), the panels raised concerns over instances where the local offshore lecturers engaged in the teaching of the Australian transnational degrees were found to have neither the experience, nor the qualifications, to teach the relevant subjects.

Third, there is ambiguity around accountability for monitoring offshore teaching. Exporting universities have, at times, not had clear responsibilities where offshore teaching or monitoring of offshore teaching is concerned.

Fourth, 'soft marking' is a frequently cited issue in relation to the quality of transnational education (Kell & Vogl, 2008; O'Keefe, 2007; Harman, 2006). There have been claims that Australian universities are practising 'soft marking' to ensure higher pass rates in their offshore programs (O'Keefe, 2007; Harman, 2006) and as an attempt to satisfy the student customers. Such concerns arise when a university becomes highly dependent on the revenue generated from offshore activities.



At times, attempts by national authorities or the higher education community to resolve the issues may have produced the by-product of perceived 'cultural imperialism'. This is a situation where the focus on ensuring comparability of standards has led to the heavy use of the Australian context in some instances, and the questioning of the relevance of the content of the syllabus at offshore locations. The managerial approach taken by the national authorities of the three countries have also at times contributed to the already confusing standards that importing institutions face as a result of differing standards of diverse authorities.

As this outline of the issues illustrates, gaps in quality assurance can emerge when quality assurance is left to national authorities or to the higher education community.

While the need for a transnational approach to quality assurance of transnational higher education has been previously proposed (Van Damme, 2001), few empirical studies have been conducted to provide insights into how this approach towards transnational quality assurance can be achieved.

The discipline of accounting is used as the site for exploration of this potential. Accreditation by professional associations is becoming increasingly popular among universities and private education providers as the need for international recognition of qualifications increases (Stella, 2006). However, there is little empirical data that provides evidence about how transnational quality assurance can be improved through accreditation by professional associations. The current paper draws on research undertaken for a larger study and focuses on the potential role of professional associations in the quality assurance of transnational higher education.

### ***Method***

An investigation of quality assurance of transnational higher education in Australia, Singapore and Malaysia was undertaken. For the purposes of this paper, data from two main sources were used. The first was interviews conducted with institutional staff in the three countries and the second was via an analysis of policy documents from both the institutions in which these staff worked and of professional associations connected with the degree programs that were the focus of the study.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 43 staff at different organisational levels across three countries. The interviews took place at two Australian universities (18 staff), two private higher education providers in Singapore (12 staff), and two private Colleges in Malaysia (13 staff). All six institutions have extensive experience in transnational higher education in either delivery or the number of partnerships that they have established. Following the approach recommended by Huberman and Miles (1994), transcripts of interviews were analysed for key themes. Documents were analysed to provide an understanding of the context of transnational quality assurance in the three countries.

### ***Findings***

The analysis of the relevant interview data and of the policy documents indicates clearly that accreditation by professional associations such as the CPA Board has several advantages compared to quality assurance carried out by national authorities and higher education communities.

The first advantage is that accreditation by professional association such as the CPA Board encourages quality enhancement through the mandatory professional development requirements of teaching staff. Such development ensures recency of knowledge and this contributes to a high quality experience for students and graduates.

Second, accreditation such as that provided by the CPA Board promotes accountability by specifying when responsibility for certain aspects of education delivery can be transferred to offshore partners of universities. This ensures that accountability for the quality of the transnational degree

remains with the exporting university until the partnership matures sufficiently. For example, according to interviewees, the importing institution is not permitted to mark the examination papers in the first three years of a partnership. This allows time for the importing institutions to familiarise themselves with and prepare to meet the expected standards before taking over responsibility.

Third, with professional association accreditation, measuring guidelines and rules remain the same even when accreditation crosses borders. Findings gathered from the interviews suggest that standards set by national authorities or institutions can sometimes contradict one another. CPA accreditation reduces the confusion that is often caused by the different standards of authorities in both the exporting and importing countries. While one objective of CPA accreditation is to ensure comparability of the transnational education to that onshore, the accreditation also focuses on the relevancy of the syllabus for preparation for the profession (CPA, 2009). Further, as the emphasis is on the relevancy of the content of the degree in terms of preparation of graduates for the profession, the approach reduces the likelihood of cultural imperialism mentioned earlier.

Finally, accreditation by professional association is valued and accepted by several stakeholders, including institutions, national auditory body requirements, students and employers.

### **Conclusion**

The potential benefits of transnational higher education can only be achieved if there is certainty in the quality of the provision. Past attempts by national authorities and the higher education community to manage the quality of transnational higher education have proven to be insufficient to resolve the issues and at times created new challenges to providers. When left to national authorities or the higher education community, quality assurance processes tend to focus on quality compliance rather than quality enhancement. The potential role of professional associations, indicated from the analysis of the contribution made to the accounting discipline in three countries of the CPA Board is thus worth further investigation. The role of such associations may be of interest to countries other than those examined and in particular to emerging transnational higher education arrangements in India and China.

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## **The Benchmarking COMPASS<sup>®</sup> Database: A Confidential Interactive Web Based Strategy to Benchmark Learning Outcomes**

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### **Abstract**

*The speech pathology discipline has been actively developing frameworks, measures and threshold standards for student learning outcomes over the past decade. Most recently all universities providing speech pathology programs in Australia and New Zealand have successfully collaborated to develop the Benchmarking COMPASS<sup>®</sup> Database. This database is a sophisticated interactive online system that confidentially harvests student learning outcomes (assessment scores) and de-identifies and pools the scores for benchmarking on a daily basis. This session will demonstrate the database functionality and provide information to inform other disciplines wishing to benchmark learning outcomes as a strategy for quality improvement of curriculum.*

**Keywords:** benchmarking, interactive online database, student learning outcomes

*Conference theme: How is it demonstrated? (Peer review paper)*

### **Introduction**

Australian universities are actively engaged in developing frameworks of student learning outcomes along with measuring and benchmarking these outcomes (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, nd). Key issues include identifying relevant frameworks (AQF, 2011), threshold standards (TEQSA, 2011) and effective strategies to benchmark against these standards (Garlic & Pryor, 2004). The speech pathology discipline has been addressing these issues for the past decade through the following projects:

- Development of a valid and reliable competency based assessment tool, COMPASS<sup>®</sup>: Competency assessment in speech pathology (McAllister, Lincoln, Ferguson, & McAllister, 2006), a tool for identifying and measuring student learning outcomes in practicum topics;
- National roll-out and training in use of COMPASS<sup>®</sup> for universities, clinical educators and students (Ferguson, Lincoln, McAllister, & McAllister, 2008);
- Development and trial of a process for national benchmarking of student learning outcomes (COMPASS<sup>®</sup> scores) in speech pathology (Lincoln, Ferguson, McAllister, & McAllister, 2008 );
- Development of COMPASS<sup>®</sup> Online (SPAA, 2009);

These projects have been supported by effective collaboration and contributions by Speech Pathology Australia, The Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) and all Australian and New Zealand Universities who provide speech pathology education. Each project has ensured that the perspectives of students, clinical educators, the professional discipline and universities have been meaningfully addressed (Ferguson, McAllister, Lincoln, & McAllister, 2008; Ferguson, McAllister, Lincoln, & McAllister, 2010; McAllister, Lincoln, Ferguson, & McAllister, 2008).

This work has recently been advanced through an ALTC Priority Projects grant, to develop a confidential interactive web based database to benchmark COMPASS® scores as a key learning outcome measures across speech pathology programs. The resulting Benchmarking COMPASS® Database (McAllister et al., in press) is now being used to compare the learning trajectories of groups of students across universities and to inform discussion about curriculum strategies to best support this learning. This paper describes the development of the database and its functionality.

### ***Background***

This project aimed to design a benchmarking database that harvested and benchmarked data from COMPASS® Online, a web based clinical competency assessment tool that includes features to manage and carry out student assessments. The tool includes the following:

- Assessment: Rating scales for each speech pathology competency area;
- Assessment Resource Manual: Supports clinical educators and students in their judgement of competency and planning learning;
- Technical Manual: Technical information on scoring and interpretation of COMPASS® scores by university staff;
- Training Modules: To support clinical educators in their assessment and teaching roles.

Clinical educators can securely log on and rate students' developing competency online and provide other related information to universities about the assessment (e.g. client group(s) the student worked with). Students can also enter self assessments of their competency development. University coordinators use COMPASS® Online to manage the placement process, score assessments, generate reports and communicate with students and educators.

The usefulness of COMPASS® for universities' quality improvement agendas lies in three key features. First, a valid framework of learning outcomes: COMPASS® incorporates the Speech Pathology Competency Based Occupational Standards – Entry Level (referred to as CBOS) (SPAA, 2001) which describes the competencies and level of achievement required of graduate speech pathologists. The COMPASS® assessment combines these 7 CBOS competencies with competencies identified by the profession as important professional capacities for development and maintenance of quality speech pathology practice (McAllister, Lincoln, Ferguson, & McAllister, 2010) and are grouped under the headings of Reasoning, Lifelong Learning, Communication and Professionalism. The resulting combination of 11 competencies are a valid and assessable representation of speech pathology competence and map to graduate attributes (McAllister, 2006; McAllister et al., 2010).

Second, valid threshold standards: COMPASS® provides guidelines for identifying levels of performance and produces validated measures based on clinical educator's ratings of students' performance. Psychometric validation of COMPASS® confirmed that the assessment was in fact assessing what it purports to assess. Additionally, the ratings can be converted in to valid measures (scores) with known properties (McAllister, 2006). These scores can then be benchmarked within and across university programs.

Third, alignment: COMPASS® aligns with quality assessment and teaching practices by attending to the impact of assessment on learning, ensuring assessment judgements are based on multiple observations and evidence, and assessing authentic practice (McAllister et al., 2010). COMPASS® also facilitates the

provision of detailed mid placement formative feedback on performance and summative assessment of achievement at the end of placements.

Furthermore, speech pathology academics view their teaching as preparing capable professionals who are able to competently practice their profession. Therefore students' ability to apply knowledge to practice through practicum is seen by academics as a key indicator of quality university based curricula.

COMPASS<sup>®</sup> has been adopted as an assessment strategy for topics incorporating practicum and rapidly integrated into curricula of all universities in Australia and New Zealand that provide speech pathology programs (Ferguson et al., 2008). As a result, these universities share a framework of learning outcomes, have established a common exit standard and measurement system and are able to establish and share threshold standards both within and across programs. This created an ideal environment in which to benchmark assessment data as a strategy to quality improve curriculum.

Furthermore, a previous ALTC funded project identified that speech pathology academics were enthusiastic about the potential of benchmarking COMPASS<sup>®</sup> data, and established agreed legal and ethical guidelines for this activity (Lincoln et al., 2008). These included: how to establish benchmarking agreements; who should have access to benchmarking results and how they should be used; types of COMPASS<sup>®</sup> measures to use; and the way in which student groups would be defined to assist with meaningful and useful comparisons.

This project also identified that collecting and calculating benchmarks was time consuming and raised issues with regard to confidentiality and use of data. The advent of COMPASS<sup>®</sup> Online (described above) was identified as an opportunity to develop a confidential and time efficient strategy for benchmarking. Consequently, the current project had two major goals: to develop an ethical, efficient and sustainable cross-institutional benchmarking strategy to benchmark COMPASS<sup>®</sup> data; and to support speech pathology academics in using benchmarking information for curriculum improvement. Of particular interest is identifying learning and teaching practices that prepare and support students' translation of knowledge into practice.

### ***Method***

The project included three phases: development of the Benchmarking COMPASS<sup>®</sup> Database; developing speech pathology academics' capacity to use this data to evaluate curricula and for research; and sustaining practice through providing tools and resources for ongoing effective participation in benchmarking. This paper will describe the outcomes of the development phase, further details of the other phases of the project can be found in McAllister et al (in press).

The design phase was complex and time-consuming, and involved multiple cycles of consultation and feedback to ensure that the original intent was met, and the desired functionality achieved. However, this process, in combination with the knowledge and expertise within the project team, the database developer (Portal Australia), steering committee and Speech Pathology Australia resulted in a database that surpassed the original conceptualisation of the system (McAllister et al., in press).

Key steps included (p. 7) (McAllister et al., in press):

1. Conceptual decision-making regarding desired functionality, with reference to feasibility, desirability and project goals;
2. Alterations to COMPASS<sup>®</sup> Online data fields and definitions to ensure appropriate data would be available for benchmarking;
3. Establishing and documenting specifications for database design;
4. Building the Benchmarking COMPASS<sup>®</sup> Database;
5. Revising the database design in response to stakeholder feedback.

In addition, information and training resources were developed and incorporated as 'Help' documents to assist academics to use the database and interpret reports. Speech Pathology Australia (SPA), the accrediting body for speech pathology programs, played a key support role in two respects. First, SPA agreed to the Benchmarking COMPASS<sup>®</sup> Database to be built as a 'sister' database to COMPASS<sup>®</sup> Online to enable direct and confidential access to assessment scores. Second, SPA agreed to alterations to COMPASS<sup>®</sup> Online data fields to better capture data of interest in relation to placement demographics as well as allowing reports to be added that allow universities to check the integrity of the placement data recorded.

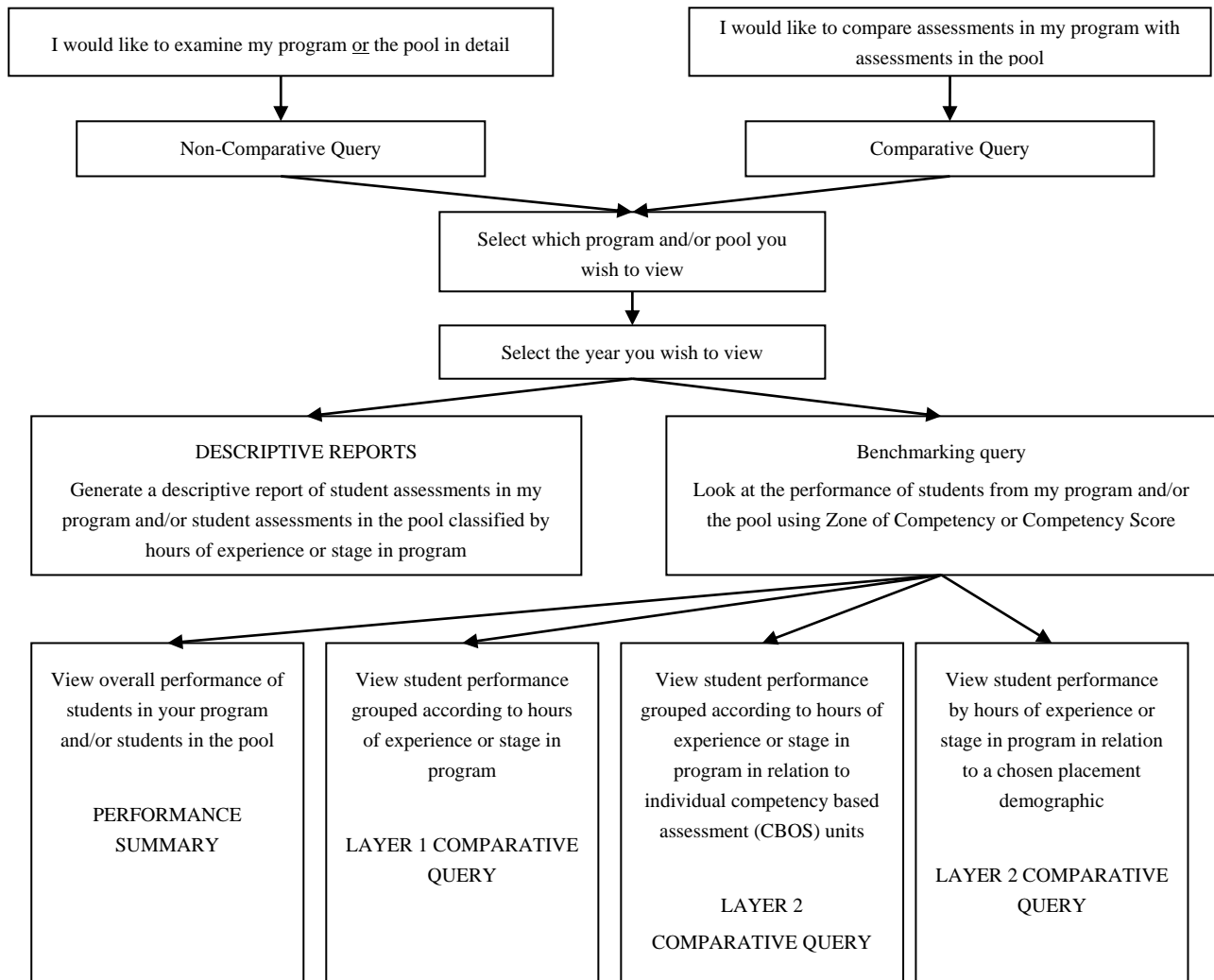
## **Results**

The design process succeeded in developing a secure, interactive online database that allows speech pathology academics to generate reports to describe or compare the performance of student's on COMPASS<sup>®</sup> with that of the pooled performance of similar groups of speech pathology students from other universities (McAllister et al., in press). University programs can then self-assess regarding the trajectory and achievement of competency development of their speech pathology students in relation to speech pathology students nationally and internationally. Academics can also share reports with benchmarking partners to identify whether any specific differences exist between particular universities and types of programs.

The Benchmarking COMPASS<sup>®</sup> Database has the following features:

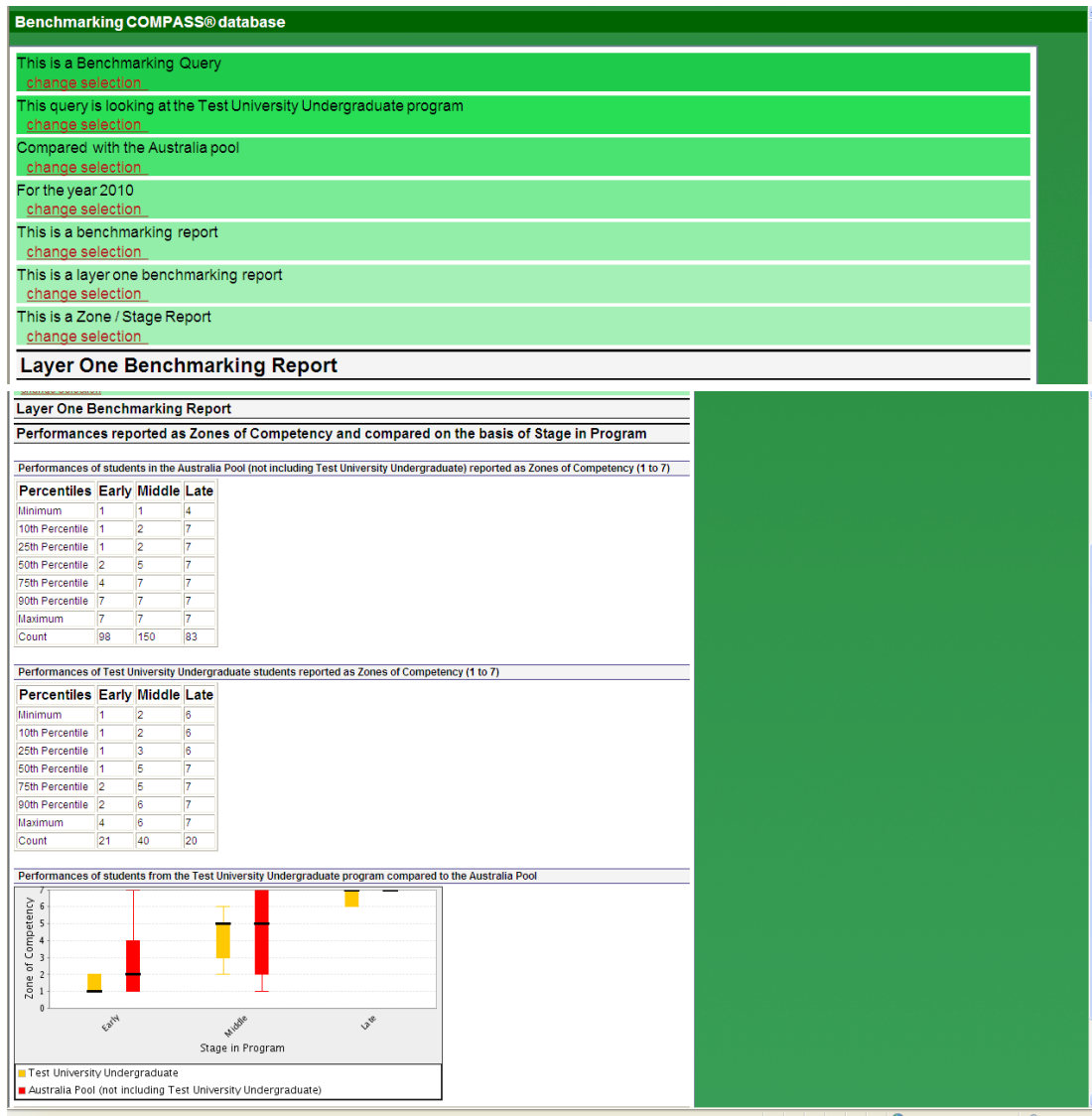
- Controlled levels of confidential access including:
  - Benchmarking Chair: manages universities' enrolments on the database, creates and maintains pools and, with permission, can view an individual university's benchmarked data to assist with problem solving or interpretation,
  - University Coordinator: manages their university's involvement with the database,
  - University User: up to 5 staff from each university can be provided with access to the benchmarked data;
- COMPASS<sup>®</sup> assessment scores are harvested, de-identified and collated daily;
- Student performance can be benchmarked as:
  - Competency Scores: finely grained measures of assessment performance,
  - Zones of Competency: 7 incremental groups of performance levels into which the students' Competency Scores can be placed with confidence;
- Students can be grouped according to 2 types of experience measures:
  - Place in the sequence of practicum topics (Early, Mid, Late),
  - Hours of experience;
- Students can be separated into further subgroups and their collective performance benchmarked according to features of practica that are predicted by academics to influence students' development of competence. See Table 1 for a full list of these benchmarking fields;
- Ability to generate 474 different types of reports on the assessment performances of the entire pool or specific subgroups of students as:
  - Non-comparative reports summarising student performance in a single university program or in a single pool,
  - Comparative reports comparing student performance in a single university program to the pooled performances of students from other university programs;
- Historical benchmarked scores are available from when universities first enrol in the database and can be viewed year by year;
- Reports can be saved in PDF format for sharing and discussion (guided by the Code of Conduct).

See Figure 1 for the decision making tree that is used to build queries and generate reports. Figure 2 provides a screen shot to illustrate the view provided once a query tree is completed and a report generated. A Demonstration Benchmarking COMPASS<sup>®</sup> Database can be accessed from <http://benchmarking.portal.com.au/>. This version is fully operational and includes the types of queries that can be built on the live version as well as relevant training and information documentation. However the student assessment scores are fictitious and limited in number and insufficient for generating reports based on complex queries.



**Figure 1: Benchmarking COMPASS<sup>®</sup> database decision-making flowchart (p. 14)**  
(McAllister et al., 2011)





**Figure 2: Screen shot of the benchmarking COMPASS® database in operation (p. 15)**  
 (McAllister et al., 2011)

**Table 1: Benchmarking fields related to placement demographics (p. 16) (McAllister et al., 2011)**

Placement Demographic Heading	Placement Demographic Options
<b>Client Age Group</b>	Adult Child Mixed
<b>Placement Intensity</b>	Block Sessional
<b>Client Location</b>	Rural/Regional Town Metropolitan Capital City Metropolitan Other International
<b>Range Indicators</b>	Speech Language

Placement Demographic Heading	Placement Demographic Options
	Fluency Voice Swallowing
Clinical Practice Setting	Educational Home Hospital Inpatients Hospital Outpatients Rehabilitation Community Health Community Other
Intervention Model	Consultative Direct Both
Service Delivery Model	Group Individual Both

### ***Discussion***

The speech pathology discipline has demonstrated that a framework for learning outcomes can be adopted across universities and that academics will enthusiastically engage in collaborative benchmarking for quality improvement of curriculum (McAllister et al., in press). The Benchmarking COMPASS® Database is a confidential and efficient strategy for supporting this engagement and the discipline has indicated ongoing support for this by placing collaborative benchmarking on the agenda of the next Asia Pacific Education Collaboration in Speech Language Pathology meeting in June 2011. Representatives from university programs will meet to compare and discuss benchmarking data with a view to identifying areas and processes for quality improvement in their curricula.

The database will provide useful information for programs to set and identify benchmarks, investigate benchmarking outcomes and identify questions for collaborative research on educational outcomes. New courses will be able to evaluate how well their students are meeting standards during the implementation of the new degree rather than waiting until the end. Established courses will be able to benchmark their outcomes against other universities as well as use internal benchmarking to monitor the impact of curriculum changes on learning outcomes. The Benchmarking COMPASS® Database provides a potential model for other disciplines and courses to investigate, as a way forward to meet the current standards and quality agendas in the Australian higher education context.

However, successful engagement with benchmarking for curriculum improvement requires ongoing access to quality tools as well as strategies to support effective use of the information generated. Challenges facing the discipline include the need to review COMPASS® Online to reflect the new competency based standards that will be launched by Speech Pathology Australia in June 2011, and revalidate the measures generated by the new version. Speech Pathology academics will need to continue to find time to engage with each other to compare, critique and discuss their data, as well as induct new academics into the use and interpretation of benchmarks for curriculum improvement.

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## Frameworks for Quality: Developing a Faculty Quality Management Framework

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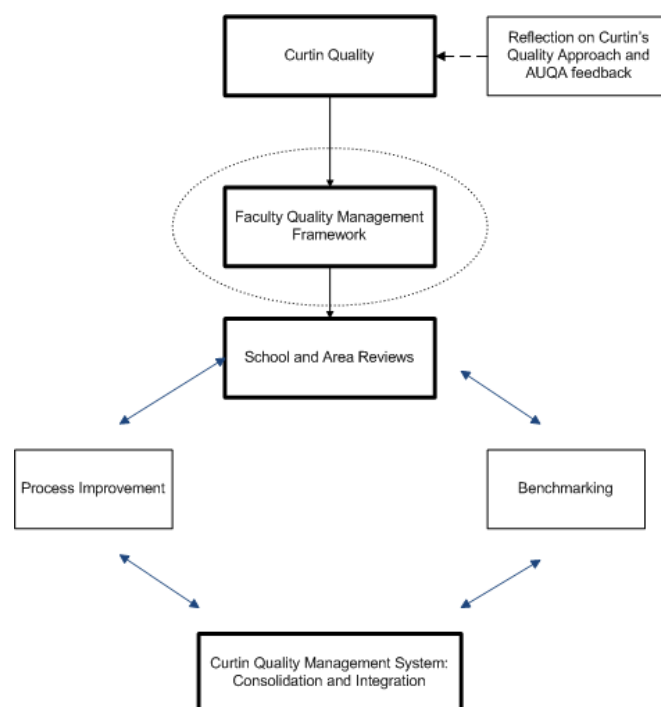
### Abstract

*This paper identifies how one Faculty has developed a customised quality management framework to best meet its need to develop a stronger and more transparent approach to Quality that could be communicated to staff across all schools and research centres. The framework is discussed in detail and further information is provided on how the Faculty is in the process of undertaking a major domestic and international benchmarking project to drive continuous improvement around the critical processes identified in the framework and how all of this work is contributing to a stronger approach to Curtin University's new School and Area Review process.*

**Keywords:** quality management, excellence, self assessment

### Introduction

Building on the experience and learnings of the AUQA Cycle 2 Audit, Curtin committed to developing an even stronger approach to managing quality across all areas of the University (McKenna 2009). The new School and Area Review process was a major initiative to drive continuous improvement but it became evident early on that what was also required was a stronger and more strategic focus on quality at Faculty and other Executive area level. (Refer Figure 1) This paper describes the progress made to date in one faculty, the Faculty of Health Sciences, to develop and implement a comprehensive Quality Management Framework. The intention is that the learnings from this pilot will significantly benefit the other faculties, and thus make a major contribution to strengthening of Curtin's overall quality approach.



**Figure 1: Strengthening quality at Curtin**

## ***Background***

The Faculty of Health Sciences at Curtin University with a student population of eight thousand five hundred, a staff of seven hundred and sixty and an operating budget of approximately \$165 Million, has been going through significant change and development. The Faculty has a newly formed research presence, the Curtin Health Innovation Research Institute (CHIRI) with a focus on translational research in policy and practice focussed on six strategic themes and a strong focus on the development of Inter-professional Education. It is presently in the process of negotiating a new Medical School incorporating a Common Core First Year Curriculum. The Faculty is also conducting an international and domestic Faculty Benchmarking Project with the purpose of identifying best practice across its critical processes of Teaching and Learning, Research, Internationalisation, Students, Community Engagement and Business Support processes.

The Faculty is committed to a transparent demonstration of quality and the need for this is reinforced by the increasing demands of government, community and students. Steed and Pupius (2003) reviewing excellence in higher education models state that:

“Regardless of size, culture, tradition or background, to be successful in the future, higher education needs to deliver excellence in all areas, with less resource, to an ever more demanding global customer base.”

A major focus of the Faculty Quality Management Framework is its ability to bring together the most significant aspects of the Faculty’s approach to quality in a consistent manner that can be reported on by management through its governance structure, its Faculty Academic Board, with its strongest focus being on student outcomes. The framework helps to identify the strengths and gaps in the Faculty’s present approach to quality management.

The key drivers for this approach are: the Curtin University Vision; de-regulation and uncapping of places in 2012; increased focus on the ‘quality of the student experience’ (Curtin AUQA theme 2008); proposed TEQSA legislation.

## **What is the Quality Management Framework? (Refer Appendix 1: Faculty of Health Sciences Quality Management Framework)**

A conceptual framework has been defined by Miles and Huberman (1994), as “a written or visual presentation that explains either graphically, or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key factors, context, and the presumed relationship among them”.

The Faculty of Health Sciences Quality Management Framework in its present iteration is a conceptual framework that addresses the complexities of a rapidly changing environment along with the complexities of the size and function of the Faculty with its seven schools, three research centres and seven institutes. One of the goals is to provide a one page framework that reflects the critical business of the Faculty, including its important processes and success measures, and distinguishes between management and governance responsibilities. It is part of an overall Faculty communication process which enables all staff to see how their roles and responsibilities contribute to the overall quality of the Faculty as it strives for excellence. It should be noted that the Framework is very much a work in action.

## ***How the Framework is Organised***

The following components identify the crucial concepts and links around which the Framework is built. The seven elements of the Curtin Quality Framework (Figure 2) are categorised as inputs, processes and outputs, and are interwoven into the Framework and supported by the separation of management and governance responsibilities. The identification of business support processes (e.g., IT, finance), is seen as a crucial element as academic processes (e.g., teaching and research) to be truly effective, are highly

dependent on ‘good practice’ business systems. The focus on closing the continuous quality improvement cycle is reflected in the importance of producing reports (e.g., School Review, Professional Accreditation reports etc.) that address all elements of the ADRI cycle, particularly the ‘Results’ and ‘Improvement’ phases.

**Key components:**

**1. Curtin University Source Documents:**

Three main University documents drive the approach to Planning, Quality and Risk Management across the University. The Curtin University Strategic Plan (determines priorities and establishes the measures and targets to be used across the University); the Curtin Quality Framework and the Risk Management approach cascade to all areas.

**2. Governance Responsibilities:**

The Faculty has strengthened the role and membership of its Faculty Academic Board (FAB) and the Quality, Planning and Risk Management Committee, a sub-committee of the FAB, now addresses all matters related to these issues across the Faculty and provides the FAB with a level of confidence that all quality and compliance issues are being addressed.

**3. Management Responsibilities:**

The Pro-Vice Chancellor (PVC) along with the Deans, Faculty Business Manager and Heads of School form the Faculty Executive and have the day to day responsibility for ensuring quality in all aspects of their portfolios.

**4. Faculty Executive Leadership Commitment and Quality Guiding Principles:**

Three years ago the Faculty Executive developed the following Leadership Commitment statement: ‘The Faculty Executive team – leads the Faculty to set strategic direction, models a high performance culture, delivers innovative education and research outcomes, and values and supports staff’.

In addition the following Guiding Principles have been established:

- a) The Faculty leaders are committed to evidence based decision making
- b) As Faculty staff we all work within a system and improved outcomes come when we improve the system and its associated processes
- c) Sustainability is determined by our ability to create and deliver value for our students and stakeholders and therefore effective partnerships are vital
- d) The overall potential of the Faculty is realised through its people’s enthusiasm, resourcefulness and participation; people development and a good working environment are crucial to success
- e) As Faculty staff we all share the responsibility for continuous improvement

(Adapted from the EFQM Excellence Model 2003).

**5. Review of Student and Stakeholders Requirements:**

With students (and / or their parents) paying even greater amounts for their studies and employers having greater expectations from new graduates, the need to develop good management practice is even more of an imperative. Steed and Pupius (2003) state:

“Most if not all, institutions aim to put students at the heart of learning and teaching – whilst considering other key stakeholders, such as parents, employers, partners, funding providers and regional/local communities. The student relationship often goes far beyond what might traditionally be viewed as a customer relationship, with students in some institutions seen as partners in the learning process. This means that unless institutions are driven by a way of working that looks inside at what is being done and how it is being done for all key stakeholders, then it is unlikely that continual improvement which meets or exceeds stakeholder’s expectations, could be achieved and sustained.”

As identified earlier, the Faculty is particularly focussed on student outcomes. The importance of this has been reinforced by the recent appointment of a Dean of Students. The requirements of other stakeholders: Employers, Professional Bodies and Government are undergoing further review.

6. Review of Student and Stakeholder Requirements – evidence of how their requirements are met:

While the University has clear measures and targets to identify progress in achieving student outcomes the work being undertaken as part of 5 above will help clarify the specific measures required to ensure the other stakeholder needs are being met.

7. Critical Faculty Processes:

There are two specific University Mission focussed processes: Teaching and Learning and Research and Development. These are the two major academic activities which drive all other processes. The priorities for these along with the measures and targets and routine reporting are determined by the University Strategic Plan and the relevant Enabling Plans. The other Faculty critical processes, addressed through a matrix model, are International, Students and Community Engagement. Wherever possible, boundaries are being broken down to ensure a smoother student flow that best meets their needs. Refer Faculty Benchmarking project below for information on the significant improvement project in hand related to this.

8. Business Support Processes:

The importance of the business support processes providing adequate support to the academic activities cannot be stressed enough. The Chancellor of University California, Berkeley is attributed with the following quote which is seen as best summarising the move for integrated quality approaches: “It is time for change at Berkeley. We need to examine all aspects of how we conduct our business with the aim of streamlining decision making and infusing our campus community with a service orientation. We must make certain that the same ethos of excellence that marks our teaching and research permeates our entire organisation. Organisational effectiveness is everyone’s responsibility.” (Steed, C and Pupius, M. 2003).

9. Reports on Quality Outcomes and Continuous Improvement Action Plans:

For students and each of the other stakeholders, specific measures and targets have been identified which reflect the achievement of outcomes and which are reported on to the Quality, Planning and Risk Management Committee and through this Committee to the Faculty Advisory Board. This ensures that the Faculty is ‘closing the loop’ on all quality, planning and risk management related items. Examples of reports include: School Review Portfolios and subsequent Review Panel Reports with School Action Plans to address any Recommendations; Professional Accreditation Reports: submissions, reports and Action Plans; ad hoc reports as appropriate; Quality Improvement Action Plans. This approach to reporting using normal processes and documentation is supported by Stella & Woodhouse (2006), where, reflecting on quality developments in Europe they state that there is ‘a move towards using each institution’s normal processes and documentation rather than documentation prepared for the audit’.

10. Whole of Faculty Focus on ‘One Standard’ Issues:

The quality approach developed by the Faculty applies to all aspects of Faculty academic programs regardless of the geographical setting in which the course is delivered. This ensures that regional and trans-national programs are all addressed within the one standard, i.e.: One standard, all students, all locations, all modes of learning. (AUQA 2009).

***Other Initiatives Contributing to the Development of a Faculty wide Sustainable Approach to Continuous Improvement and Excellence***

The following are examples of major initiatives being undertaken by the Faculty which will contribute to driving a long term sustainable approach to quality management.

*School and Area Review (University) Pilot*

The School of Public Health within the Faculty of Health Sciences at Curtin was the first pilot of the School and Area Review Process. This process is based on the Curtin Quality Framework – see Figure 2 below. The process involves the School undertaking a Self Assessment exercise based on each of the

seven elements in Figure 2 and scores itself against an ADRI (Approach-Deployment-Review/Results-Improvement) cycle of continuous improvement rating scale. The actual rating has to be supported by the appropriate evidence with three year trend data required. Having completed the Self Assessment, the School undertakes a detailed analysis to identify its strengths and areas for improvement, particularly focussed on Teaching and Learning and Research. The final report also includes an Action Plan clearly identifying how the identified areas for improvement will be addressed plus a clear vision for the future of the School. A Review Panel, which includes two external 'experts' in related disciplines, one of whom chairs the review, validates the School's Self Assessment. A report is prepared by the Panel and the School responds addressing any Recommendations. The second School to undertake this Review process has also identified the requirements for its Professional Accreditation body and is developing an approach which will meet the needs of both the School Review and the Professional Accreditation.

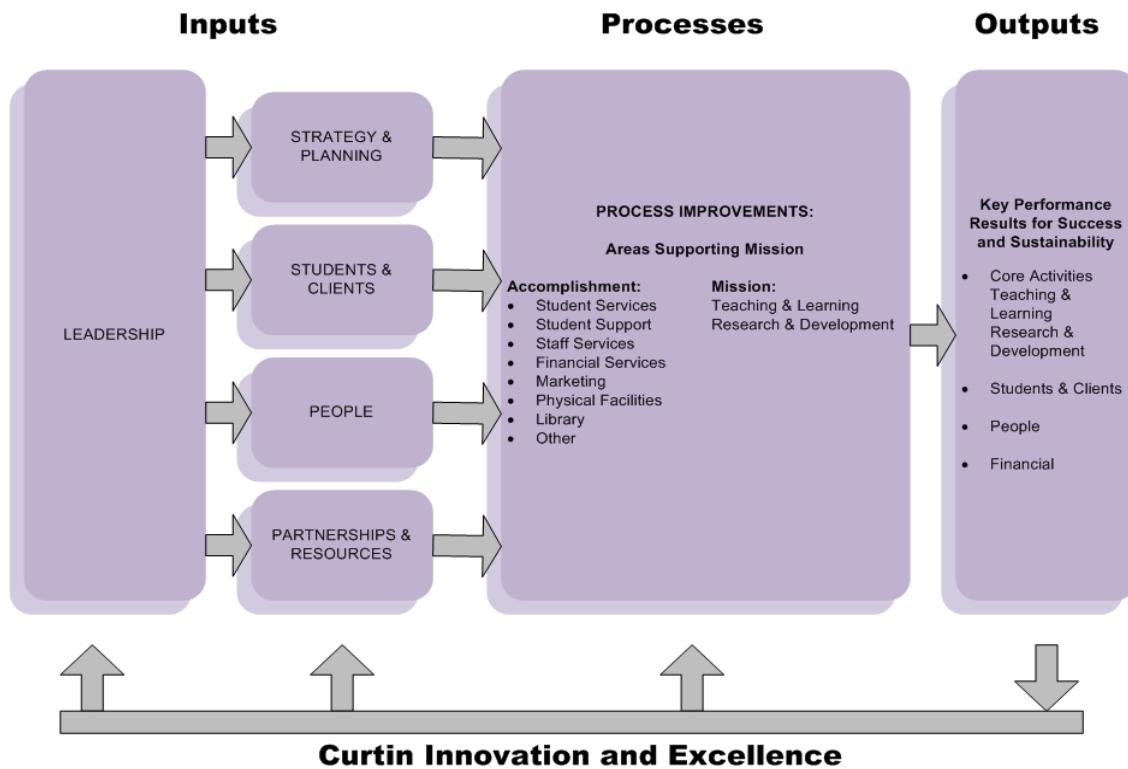


Figure 2: Curtin Quality Framework

#### *Faculty Benchmarking Project*

In 2010 the Faculty commenced a Faculty level benchmarking project focussed on identifying best practice across its critical processes: Teaching and Learning, Research, Internationalisation and Business Support Processes. (Students, as an independent strategic process was added in 2011). Universities within Australia, the US, UK, Asia and China were chosen based on whether they were 'Peer' or 'Aspirant' universities. The benchmarking partners complete both a qualitative template (with questions relating to the four areas) and a quantitative data template (seeking comparisons of data related to staff and student numbers and related matters). There are eight universities in the study and so far four have been visited for in-depth interviews. The project is due to be completed by June 30 2011.

#### *Mapping of Proposed TEQSA Legislation*

The Faculty is currently undertaking a mapping process to identify the proposed TEQSA legislation (Provider Standards) impact on the Curtin Academic Standards. Workshops have been conducted with the Faculty Executive and Directors of Teaching and Learning and a document has been created that identifies where the two approaches are aligned and clearly identifies which of the Deans has particular responsibility for each item within their portfolio. This exercise will continue to evolve as further information on the proposed legislation becomes available. A risk management approach will be developed to ensure legislative compliance.



### ***Conclusion – Maintaining Momentum with the Faculty Quality Journey***

As part of the Faculty Executive's review of its Strategic Plan, the PVC has identified quality across the whole Faculty, as a 2011 major planning priority. The outcome of the Benchmarking project will be of considerable value in identifying further improvements to our academic and business support processes and also as a way of recognising our own good practices and celebrating our achievements. Workshops are being conducted for all School leaders along with the Executive as we explore still further potential quality improvements, particularly related to improved student outcomes with a major focus on acknowledging the diverse backgrounds, aptitudes and abilities of our students.

The Faculty is committed to ongoing learning and benchmarking with overseas universities at Faculty and School level with leaders across the Faculty being encouraged to continue to identify best practice within their areas and to facilitate the necessary improvements identified from their learning.

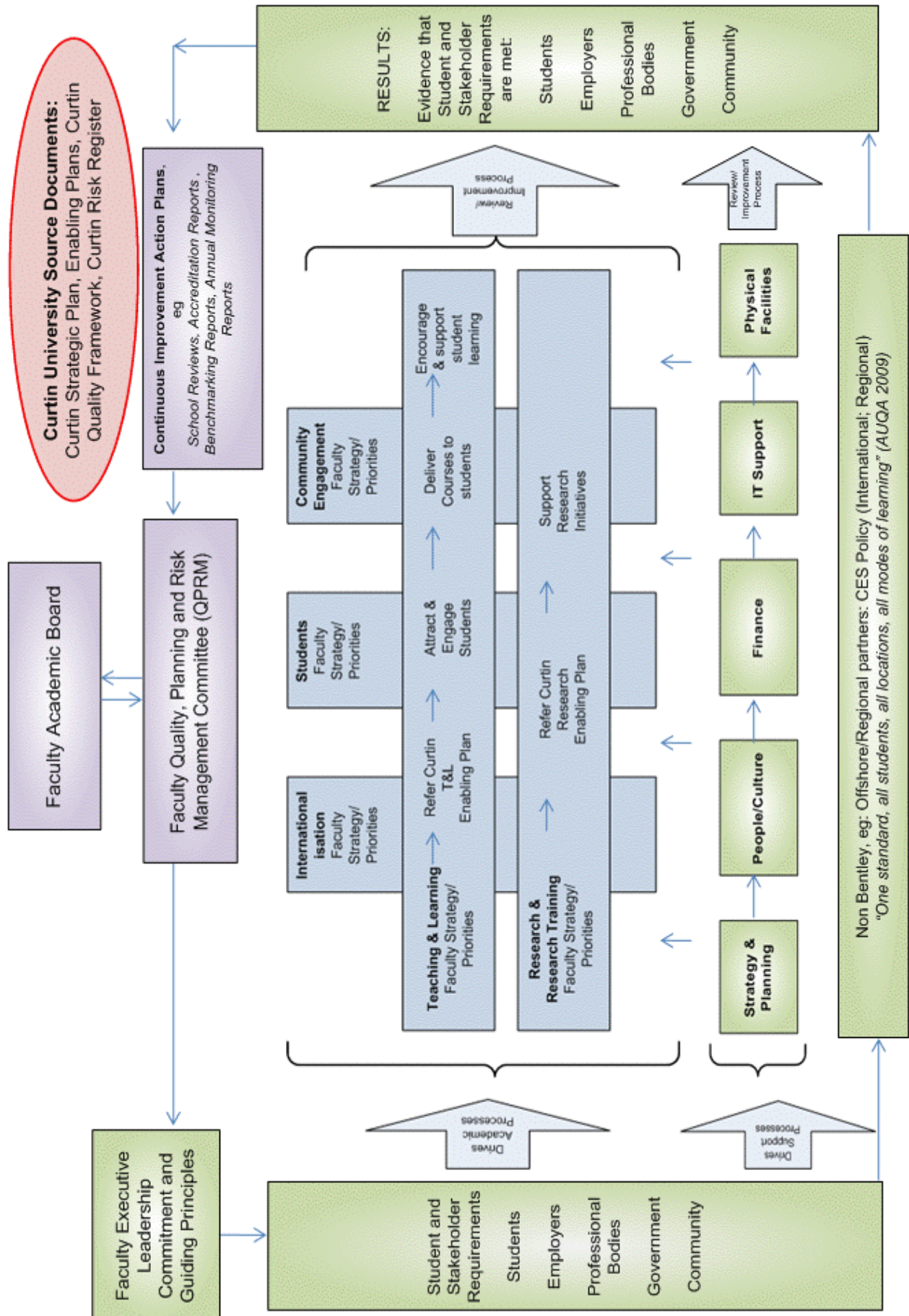
The Faculty of Health Sciences' Quality Management Framework should greatly assist in clarifying the roles of the various 'managers' across the Faculty and ensure a strong alignment as it progresses in its whole of Faculty approach to continuous improvement leading to excellence.

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## Ensuring Quality in Undergraduate Curriculum Reform: Experience in Hong Kong

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### Abstract

*This paper is set in the context of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), a comprehensive research university with a bilingual tradition. The educational reform and quality-assurance (QA) system in Hong Kong is explained, as is the way that policy for teaching and learning has been developed and enacted at CUHK. We have developed an evidence-based system for monitoring and supporting all our taught programmes. This long-standing process has been adapted to the unique circumstance of a total curriculum change for undergraduate education which accompanies a major expansion in 2012. A mass review of all ~60 new programme designs, compressed into an 18-month time-frame, is under way. The significant changes have associated risks that can be ameliorated with clear and collegial QA procedures.*

**Keywords:** teaching and learning policy, curriculum change, programme reviews

### Educational Change in Hong Kong

Times of mass change in educational systems can be seen as opportunities for facilitating changes that might be difficult in more stable times. The Hong Kong government has embarked on a comprehensive and ambitious programme of educational reform across schools, a range of post-secondary education options and universities. One clear rationale for this reform is largely to support students in developing the suite of broad capabilities they will need for a complex and increasingly globalized world. Also, Hong Kong has recently adopted a system of university quality audits under the aegis of the Quality Assurance Council (QAC) – a body modelled closely on the Australian Universities Quality Agency.

The University Grants Committee (UGC) of Hong Kong is responsible for advising the Government of Hong Kong on the development and funding needs of higher-education institutions (HEIs) in Hong Kong. There are eight UGC-funded HEIs, seven of which have university status ([http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/site/fund\\_inst.htm](http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/site/fund_inst.htm)). Outcomes-based approaches (OBAs) to teaching and learning (T&L) receive increasing attention in Hong Kong. Table 1 is an annotated timeline of events since the mid-1990s showing a gradual, but clearly directed, increase in government intervention to ensure that the Hong Kong HEIs have an OBA that is not merely output-driven but is based on indicators that are recognized as pertaining to student learning.

The most significant of these more directed government initiatives, as far as universities are concerned, is the change in Hong Kong's higher-education system in 2012 from a normative three-year undergraduate curriculum to a normative four-year curriculum, with the duration of secondary schooling correspondingly reduced from seven years to six, segmented into three years of junior secondary and three years of senior secondary; the new system is therefore known as '3+3+4'. The rationale for the extra year is provided in the section 'Curriculum Framework for 2012' in this paper.

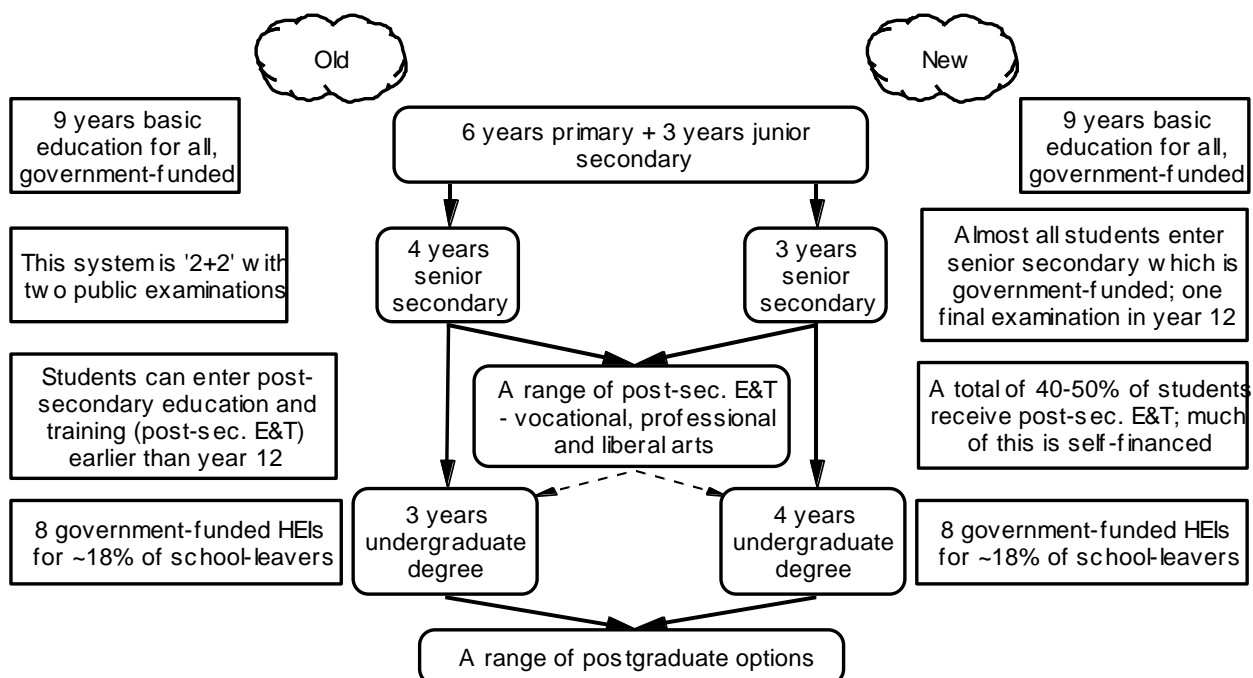
In the new system, intake remains broadly the same, so undergraduate student numbers increase by one third. The transition is more complicated, especially in the watershed year of 2012 when there will be a double cohort: there will be an intake of students from the last cohort of the 'old' secondary seven-year curriculum alongside an intake of students from the first cohort of the 'new' six-year secondary



curriculum. This means that during the years 2012 to 2015 there will be students doing a three-year undergraduate degree and students doing a four-year degree. The ‘new’ curriculum, which is expected to have been designed afresh, is intended to have an OBA and this, undoubtedly, will be audited in future by the QAC. The entire education change initiative for K-12 and beyond is shown diagrammatically in Figure 1. Post-secondary education and training (the ‘sub-degree’ sector in Hong Kong) is not a focus of this paper; a useful current review is in Wan (2011).

**Table 1: Timeline of important quality initiatives in Hong Kong**

Year	Initiative
1994	The UGC initiates sector-wide Teaching Development Grants.
1997	First Teaching and Learning Quality Process Reviews (TLQPRs) at all UGC-funded HEIs. These were <i>process</i> reviews and not overtly outcome-driven: <a href="http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/publication/prog/tlqpr/tlqpr.htm">http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/publication/prog/tlqpr/tlqpr.htm</a>
2003	Second round of TLQPRs. Outcomes of good practice from the two rounds of TLQPRs are in Leung et al. (2005). Regional changes are discussed in Lee and Gopinathan (2003).
2004	<i>Hong Kong higher education: To make a difference, to move with the times</i> (UGC, 2004) clearly articulated an accent on institutional accountability.
2005	An OBA specifically mentioned as being the direction for higher education.
2006	The Quality Assurance Council (QAC) established; its focus is on T&L and not on whole-of-institutions audits ( <a href="http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/qac/">http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/qac/</a> )
2008	First QAC audit (at CUHK) with a clear search for evidence of student learning outcomes ( <a href="http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/english/teaching/teaching-learning-quality.html?area=quality-assurance-council">http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/english/teaching/teaching-learning-quality.html?area=quality-assurance-council</a> )
2012	Double cohort and the new (normative) four-year undergraduate curriculum. Universities are receiving funding for the curriculum, infrastructure and recruitment implications of this dramatic change. ( <a href="http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/about/term/334g.htm">http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/about/term/334g.htm</a> )



**Figure 1: Overview of the new formal education system in Hong Kong**

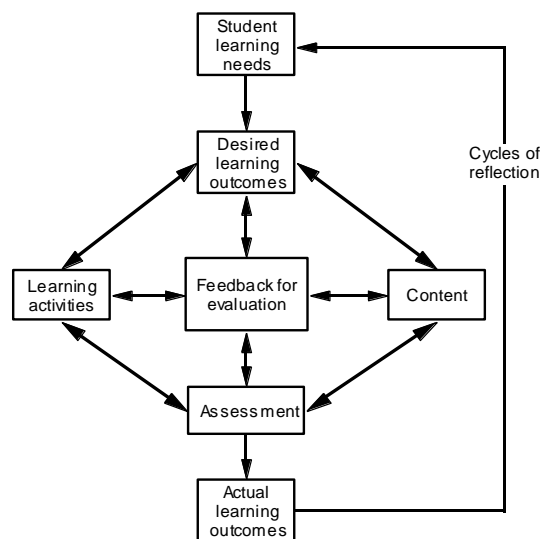
### ***Developing a Quality Assurance Framework for Teaching and Learning at CUHK***

This paper is set in the context of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), a comprehensive research university with a bilingual tradition and a collegiate structure. The University's Ten-Year Vision Statement (2003) and Strategic Plan (2006) (<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/english/aboutus/mission.html>) have set the agenda for a concerted effort for excellence, as "a leading university in China and the region". CUHK's philosophy and mission is to produce well-rounded graduates, well-trained in their major subjects and, in addition, possessing a range of skills and values appropriate to the 21st century, including a capacity for lifelong learning. Bilingual proficiency, an understanding of Chinese culture and an appreciation of other cultures are core components of the curriculum's desired outcomes, and designed to prepare our students globally as citizens and leaders.

Articulate rhetoric is one thing; however, a key question is whether the University has appropriate and effective policies, processes and support structures to ensure that its mission is enacted and achieved. Educational quality literature highlights the centrality of beliefs in the organization of effective QA schemes. Harvey and Knight (1996) argued for QA being a power for transformative change. Freed, Klugman, and Fife (2000) discussed quality as being an element of the culture of universities and described how a culture for academic excellence can be engendered by a holistic implementation of a set of quality principles.

CUHK's T&L policy, formulated by the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning (SCTL) and launched in 2004, emphasizes quality enhancement rather than quality control. The document, titled 'The Integrated Framework for Curriculum Development and Review' (Integrated Framework; <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/english/teaching/teaching-learning-quality.html>), has as its main objective "to ensure that teachers and programmes engage in reflection about teaching and learning, that such reflection is rooted in evidence and leads to action for improvement, and that incentives be provided for such efforts". The Integrated Framework received a commendation in the 2008 QAC audit of CUHK.

The principles underlying the Integrated Framework have an OBA focus: curriculum elements should align with desired learning outcomes to ensure fitness for purpose (Figure 2). To ensure local adoption and relevance, accepted principles and practices were refined with input from award-winning CUHK teachers (Kember et al., 2006). The curriculum-development model is incorporated into procedures for course (or subject/ unit/ module) development, course review, programme development and programme review. Feedback for evaluation is central as it informs reflection upon practice. Review outcomes impact budget allocation to departments, albeit indirectly and modestly.



**Figure 2: A model of an aligned curriculum (after Biggs, 2003)**

Ongoing cycles of reflection are captured in action plans which are refined through a series of review and reporting activities, including a brief annual progress report on T&L, a three-year cycle of internal course reviews; and a major programme review every six years involving a self-evaluation document and review by a panel (appointed by SCTL) that includes an external examiner. The panel's report leads to an action plan to deal with challenges and improve the quality of T&L within the programme.

#### *A Conceptual Change Model for Quality Assurance*

Effective QA schemes need to address deeply held beliefs about T&L. The pioneering work of Lewin (1952) on social change through group decision-making focused on engaging with deep-seated beliefs. Others have subsequently utilized this work in educational contexts (e.g. Nussbaum & Novick, 1982) and described a three-phase process for bringing about conceptual change:

- a process for diagnosing existing conceptual frameworks and revealing them to those involved;
- a period of disequilibrium and conceptual conflict which makes the subject(s) dissatisfied with existing conceptions; and
- a reforming or reconstruction phase in which a new conceptual framework is formed.

The programme-review process which is a central component of the Integrated Framework fits the three-stage model of conceptual change (Table 2).

**Table 2: The integrated framework and the conceptual change model**

Stage	Activity
Evidence of the need for change	Evidence can include a number of sources such as questionnaires, student panels and forums, reflections of teachers, assessment results, and peer review from colleagues.
Confronting the situation	A consideration of the programme-review report by a meeting of the programme-review panel with teachers responsible for the programme is integral to the process.
Reconstruction of a new approach	The requirement for an action plan sets an agenda for change. The reviews are cyclical and this encourages progressive trials and evaluation.

This strategy will only succeed if departments see that an evidence-based approach to QA brings real benefits in terms of student satisfaction and improved student learning outcomes. Instances of good practice are shared across the University (McNaught, 2006); this has heightened awareness and encouraged collaboration.

#### *Curriculum Framework for 2012*

Undergraduate education is becoming less specialized – because the world is changing so rapidly that a narrow discipline will no longer stand the test of time. With this trend also comes increasing recognition of enduring values and skills. Thus, the shift from three to four years reflects not just 'one more year', but also a change of emphasis, and a new way of viewing undergraduate education. Indeed, CUHK had a four-year normative curriculum at the establishment of the University in 1963 (and in the Foundation Colleges before that); however, this curriculum revision is not a return to that previous pattern but an entirely fresh curriculum design. The curriculum starts from the conviction that, both for personal development and also for career needs in the 21st century, graduates should have general attributes that apply to all university graduates, irrespective of what subject they study.

With this in mind, and especially targeting the generic capabilities that our graduates will need (and which in various surveys employers say they expect), the extra time available has been used to bolster a *University Core* – 'Core' in the sense that it is the same for students in all disciplines, and that it is centrally designed and implemented (and not determined by individual faculties or departments). This Core consists of courses in English, Chinese, General Education, Physical Education and Information

Technology that, together, occupy 32% of the credit units associated with the degree. (CUHK has a credit-unit system and the new curriculum will have 123 credit units.)

In the same vein, each Faculty has developed a *Faculty Package* that is offered to all students in the same faculty, with three courses across different domains to be taken in the first year. Selection from a common set of courses provides breadth across disciplinary boundaries and allows students in many cases to defer a firm choice of discipline major for at least a year.

The *Major Programmes* have been enhanced in depth, and modernized in content. The curriculum structure is flexible, and each student can in principle choose almost any pair of subjects and pursue a *Double Major*. Students can also pursue one or even two *Minors*. The possibility is also allowed, in selected cases, for students to pursue a connected pair of *Double Degrees* where, normally, an extra year would be necessary at non-standard tuition cost.

### ***Pedagogy and Outcomes-based Approach***

In endeavouring to make the curriculum *outcomes-based* and *student-focused*, there is an emphasis on articulating the desired outcomes that are consistent across the levels of the University, the programmes and the individual courses. Moreover, there is very conscious effort to ensure that the learning activities and the assessment align with the declared outcomes – which will then ensure that our students are given the opportunity and the incentives to develop these capabilities. While this is embedded in the Integrated Framework, the new curriculum is seen as an opportunity to revisit and strengthen these pedagogical principles.

The ‘LEPO’ (Learning, Environment, Processes, Outcomes) conceptual framework for curriculum design (Phillips, McNaught, & Kennedy, 2010, 2011) has informed thinking about the context and interactions involved in curriculum design. Within a *learning environment*, students attain *learning outcomes* by going through *learning processes* (in which students and teachers interact through learning tasks) (<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/334/english/>).

### ***Learning Environment***

The learning environment provides the context in which students engage actively with their studies. It is informed by the desired programme-level learning outcomes, and it specifies the content and resources (both traditional and electronic) which support this design. The learning environment also encompasses a range of physical and virtual spaces. CUHK has the largest physical university campus in Hong Kong and a number of major building projects add capacity for the increased student population; these include new T&L spaces and a number of new residential Colleges. One project of especial interest is the development of a number of Learning Commons to encourage self-directed learning, individually and in groups. There are a number of eLearning developments and a range of student-support services. In addition, the Colleges provide both physical learning spaces and an atmosphere of intellectual endeavour. The learning environment extends beyond the campus: there are numerous opportunities for academic exchange abroad and for internships, both locally and abroad.

### ***Learning Outcomes***

The design of the curriculum starts from the ambitious expectations specified in the University Strategic Plan (<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/strategicplan/english/documents/cuhk-strategic-plan.pdf>). The discussions about how these can be implemented in each programme and then drilled down into courses have been time-consuming, but also lively and useful.

### *Learning Processes*

Within the overall curriculum structure and requirements, there is increasing effort to promote self-directed learning, so that undergraduate education can become an exciting personal learning journey. A range of different learning activities are employed (Table 3) to develop the broad spectrum of skills and attitudes. The formal curriculum is supplemented by a wide range of experiential-learning opportunities.

### ***Ensuring the Quality of Each Undergraduate Programme's Curriculum Design***

Programme reviews have become an integral part of CUHK's QA processes, and so SCTL adapted the well-tested programme-review process for a mass review of all new programme designs, compressed into an 18-month time-frame. During the years 2010 and 2011, there will be 50–60 undergraduate programme reviews. (Some of these reviews, for cognate subjects, are 'bundled' together.) Given the numbers, the process needed is a streamlined one that still ensures programmes receive collegial, yet rigorous, feedback on their curriculum designs.

The term 'light review' has been adopted for these reviews where the focus is on design and planning for the new curriculum, as well as tracking action plans arising from the first cycle of full programme reviews. Each review panel has three members: a chairperson who is an SCTL member or very experienced in QA; an experienced academic from a broadly similar discipline area; and an experienced academic from a different discipline area. Meetings take place with teachers but not normally with students and alumni (in contrast to full programme reviews).

The logistics have been daunting but achievable with the goodwill of teachers, who see the process as a valuable one. Templates assist programmes in developing their submissions and also assist review panels in compiling clear reports with a rating scale being suggested for each section (Table 3). CUHK has an online Programme Preparation Warehouse (PPW) where many of the details are already recorded. Thus far, the reviews have been smooth and seen as constructive.



**Table 3: Outlines of templates for ‘light’ programme reviews**

Section	Explanation	Ratings for each section given by panel
1. Progress report on existing action plan		1. Needs improvement; SCTL needs to follow up
2. Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E.g. process of consultation used.</li> </ul>	
3. Alignment with OBA initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E.g. each Faculty has an OBA ‘roadmap’.</li> </ul>	
4. Outcomes statement for the programme		
5. Programme design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E.g. highlighting the differences from the three-year curriculum.</li> </ul>	2. Needs enhancement
6. Sample course outlines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foundation courses; courses which feature particular learning activities, such as laboratory courses; clinical or fieldwork courses; project or design courses; courses based on group work; interdisciplinary courses; advanced research and internship (including capstone experience, which can be a course or suite of activities); etc.</li> </ul>	3. Satisfactory
7. Learning activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lectures, interactive tutorials, laboratory work, discussion of cases, field trips, clinical placement, projects, web-based activities, other.</li> <li>Rationale;</li> <li>Workload considerations;</li> <li>Intended use of learning technologies;</li> <li>How the Programme’s learning activities dovetail with co-curricular College, University and Programme experiential learning.</li> </ul>	4. Good
8. Assessment scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Essay test or examinations, short-answer test or examinations, objective test or examinations, essays, presentations, problem sets, lab reports, projects, cases, etc.</li> <li>Rationale;</li> <li>Reference to the University policy ‘Assessment of student learning in taught programmes’ (<a href="http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/assessment">http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/assessment</a>).</li> </ul>	5. Exemplary; SCTL may want to note and spread the good practice
9. Challenges (if applicable)		Comments added as needed.

### ***Concluding Comments***

What is the long-term impact of dramatic change such as Hong Kong is experiencing? The upside is that momentum can build and more can be achieved in a short time-frame. The downsides include fatigue and time delays that can have ripple effects.

This paper has described the QA processes at CUHK that have been crafted and refined over many years. It is our belief that this firm foundation of evidence-based collegial reviews will support the University in moving to a successful curriculum change in 2012, and will contain risk to manageable proportions.

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*All in-text URLs accessed on 5 April 2011. The decision to use in-text URLs was made in order to facilitate access to relevant web documentation. This is not strictly APA style but may be more useful.*

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The earlier sections of this paper are derived (with permission) partly from the English version of McNaught (2009), and also from McNaught and Curtis (2009).

## Developing an Effective Student Feedback and Improvement System: Exemplars with Proven Success

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### Abstract

*The renewal of quality assurance in Australian higher education and government policy directions related to performance based funding using student satisfaction or experience measures and the proposal to establish My University website signals the dominance of the student voice in assessing, monitoring and rewarding quality outcomes. While such initiatives which link billions of dollars on student satisfaction measures have been subject to controversy in Australian higher education, the government persists with the use of such measures to assess and reward universities. The literature on student satisfaction or experience is substantial addressing various contexts and various cohorts of students. The area where research is limited is examples of practical application of survey and improvement frameworks which have proven to be successful in value adding, in tracking, monitoring and improving student satisfaction and rewarding consistent positive performance. This paper addresses the current gap in research by outlining features of effective survey and improvement systems based on the experience of the authors in managing surveys in a number of institutions. These student feedback and improvement frameworks aimed to listen to student voice with various cohort of students; timely data analysis and reporting (quantitative and qualitative); engagement of faculties and administrative units in actioning improvements; implementing improvements in partnership with various student groups; communicating improvements with students and finally monitoring the impact or value add of improvements in the next cycle of surveys.*

**Keywords:** student voice, student feedback and improvement

### Introduction

Student voice is gaining significant prominence in assessing and monitoring educational quality, particularly in the tertiary sector. In Australia, the government plans to use student feedback collected by the Australian Graduate Survey (AGS) and the new University Experience Survey (UES) to assess student experience and reward universities. In addition, there are plans to use the survey data in the proposed *My University* website which will be publicly available to all stakeholders to view institutional quality and transparency in university performance.

The increasing use of student satisfaction as a measure of educational quality and linking satisfaction to reward requires higher education institutions to have an effective and robust student feedback and improvement framework. This enables institutions to triangulate various sources of data to prove and improve quality in a consistent manner. The *success of such frameworks* is dependent on many factors. These include:

1. a university culture which acknowledges weaknesses and is proactive in implementing change;
2. the linking of survey data to the university's strategic plan and quality framework;
3. the engagement of students in the feedback process and their role in university management;
4. the engagement of faculties, administrative units and university entities in using feedback to reflect and improve student experience;

5. the accountability on key players such as senior staff, associate deans; etc. in implementing change initiatives;
6. the presence of standard, valid and reliable feedback tools which collect student feedback on importance and satisfaction in all areas;
7. the coordination of all surveys by a single unit within the university;
8. the survey infrastructure and expertise available in the institution to enable the use of different methodology and fast processing;
9. the ability of the university to analyse and report on qualitative and quantitative data in a timely manner for various levels in the university;
10. the ability of the university to produce an annual report card that provides trend data for future planning;
11. identification of areas needing improvement and action plans to implement improvement;
12. rewarding areas or individuals to reinforce positive behaviour;
13. communicating improvements with all stakeholders using various mechanisms;
14. monitoring the effectiveness or value add of the improvements in the next round of surveys; and
15. the ability of the institution to benchmark the results of the survey with the sector and its selected comparators.

### ***Need for a Robust Student Survey and Improvement Framework***

The increased focus on student satisfaction and experience in higher education requires institutions to understand more deeply how different cohorts of students learn and engage in the current environment. University leaders need to pay attention to the changing pattern of student participation in higher education. For example, a large proportion of contemporary students also work while studying; the growth of ICT in learning has an impact on modes of delivery; the demand for flexible and online learning, and the demand for engaged learning which enables students to undertake work experience while studying are factors which shape the student perception and experience.

With an increasing focus on stakeholder needs and expectations, evaluation data have become a crucial part of institutional research and planning for strategic decision-making in many universities (Nair, Adam and Mertova, 2008). The increased focus on access and participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds requires institutions to have better insights on the student experience of various cohorts of students rather than the current generalised approach in many universities which focuses on assessing the experience of all students or in some cases onshore versus offshore students. The experience of key groups of students such as low socio economic status, non English speaking backgrounds, Indigenous, disability, undergraduate, postgraduate coursework, higher degree research, onshore and offshore international and part-time and full-time students and flexible and online learning students is necessary to better understand the student experience. More importantly, knowing the experience of various cohorts of students enables the university to ensure that student experience of all cohorts of students is comparable and equivalent in a standards based quality regime which is focussed on assessing and monitoring student outcomes and achievements.

Various studies undertaken in Australia with Indigenous; offshore and first year students, suggests that the experience of different cohort of students is consistent in some areas. However, they are different in areas such as academic support services to support students (e.g. James, Krause and Jennings, 2010; Shah and Widin, 2010; Shah, Roth and Nair, 2010).

### ***Current Short Comings***

The current short comings related to student surveys and subsequent improvements are highlighted in many AUQA cycle 1 and 2 audits of universities and private providers. The AUQA cycle 1 audit of 39 Australian Universities provide 19 recommendations related to the need for universities to: 'gather feedback, translate feedback into actions and informing students of outcomes / acts on the finding to

ensure continuous improvement'. The cycle 2 audits of 22 universities up until early 2011 also highlight the need for improvement in the same area with 11 recommendations.

Only four universities are in the AUQA good practice database with exemplars of good practice in student feedback. The case is worse in private higher education with student feedback related recommendations in almost all audits of private providers. The current shortcoming is also evident in the national Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) results which show limited improvement between 2000–2008. According to Shah, (2011), the explicit satisfaction (percentage marking 4 and 5) result on the CEQ shows that over the seven-year period, 5.7 % improvement was made on the good teaching scale, 1.0 % on the generic skills scale and 1.4 % improvement in overall satisfaction.

The prominence of student satisfaction and experience and the outcome of the AUQA cycle 1 audits have resulted in the enhancement of institutional survey practices in some Australian universities. However, what has been lacking is consistency in the use of survey data to inform timely improvements. While universities have actively conducted student feedback, the extent to which improvements have been implemented and communicated to students is questionable. More importantly, implementing improvements and communicating to students is not the end of the survey and improvement cycle. What matters then is the extent to which the improvements have been effective in value-adding to the enhancement of the student experience. This is only possible to measure if institutions are able to track and monitor the trends in student experience after implementing change. According to Kane, Williams and Cappuccini-Ansfield (2008), trend data provides invaluable insights into how students have experienced higher education during a period of fundamental change. Satisfaction feedback data can provide insights into socio-economic, political and cultural impacts on the student experience and it can indicate what students' consistent concerns are and what priorities have changed over time.

Students are the key stakeholders of the university and their experience of teaching, learning, engagement and academic support services must be based on their voices. In other words, student experience is shaped by student judgement rather than it being defined by universities. Students play a key role in university management by providing feedback on what they see as most important and their satisfaction (Shah and Nair, 2010). A number of researchers reported that students are more likely to participate in surveys if they felt that their feedback made a meaningful contribution (Coates, 2006; Leckey & Neil 2001; Watson, 2003; and Shah & Nair, 2009). This means that students not only felt that their voice was crucial in providing valuable information, but also that their feedback was acted upon by the institution.

The experience of the authors in managing surveys in five universities suggests that incentives and number of surveys conducted does not have a huge impact on response rates. What matters to students is the genuine commitment of universities to listen to the student voice and implement timely improvement as a direct result of their voice and that improvements have impact on student learning and the campus experience. In one Australian university, the institution used 14 standard student surveys to target different student groups in order to understand the total student experience. The response sample in these surveys was always representative with response rates between 44% – 83% using online and paper based collection methodology with no incentives for student participation. This university actively engaged students in feedback, acted on the results in a timely manner, and communicated improvements initiated to all students including student associations on a biennial basis (Shah and Nair, 2006). In contrast other universities have used incentives to entice 'engagement' with surveys though with little success. For example an Australian university, had 10 awards of \$500 for students to complete end of semester unit and teaching evaluations. The outcome was a fall in response rates by 12%.

Many universities have developed internal survey questionnaires to measure student satisfaction and experience at various levels but the depth and the quality of the instruments used vary with different methodology and timing of institutional surveys. According to Harvey, (2001), very few internal survey results in UK universities are made public or even available to more than a few managers within the

institutions. Analysis undertaken by the authors suggests that an average, students participate in 6–8 standard surveys conducted by the university on an annual basis.

The last decade has witnessed a significant shift in the move from traditional paper based surveys to online survey methodology in Australian universities. Analysis undertaken by the authors on survey practices in Australian universities suggest that almost all Australian universities use mixed method, though a handful have gone totally online. The key driver in the shift from traditional paper survey to online has been cost implications and timeliness of data coding and reporting. The limitation with methodological decisions based on cost factors only in institutions with lack of research and analysis has impacted on response rates and also on satisfaction. A study in an Australian university suggest that online responses on CEQ has higher student satisfaction compared to paper based surveys (Tucker, Jones and Straker, 2008). Similar findings have emerged in the USA where Nowell, Gale and Handley (2010), found that teacher and unit evaluation using online survey methodology has attracted high student satisfaction compared to paper based surveys. The institutional survey methodological decision raises the question on whether survey methodology is doing justice to academic staff whose teaching is evaluated with low response rates and the results linked to performance review and reward. The huge reliance on student happiness or satisfaction as a measure of educational quality also raises the question on the extent to which high student satisfaction assures academic rigor and student attainment of learning outcomes and generic skills.

The key short comings in current surveys and improvement in many institutions of higher education include the following:

1. lack of centralised coordination of survey functions in some institutions. For example teacher and unit evaluations are managed by teaching and learning centres and other surveys are managed by planning units or individual units;
2. lack of evidence based decision making to improve the student experience;
3. absence of survey policy to ensure that standard surveys are used across the university to reduce duplication of resources and avoiding possible survey fatigue;
4. design of survey questionnaires and the extent to which each questionnaire is fit for its purpose in monitoring the total student experience ;
5. reviewing survey tools to ensure that it aligns with the changing pattern of student experience (e.g the use of CEQ and its validity in the current era) with online learning and work-based learning seen as important in enhancing student learning experience;
6. use of different methodology for different types of surveys;
7. lack of student engagement pre and post survey;
8. poor survey management infrastructure and resources (e.g expertise, survey software and business intelligence tools);
9. systematic use of qualitative feedback;
10. lack of awareness within the institution on the range of surveys and available data on a wide range of performance areas;
11. lack of data triangulation from various sources and findings;
12. poor reporting on survey data and how they could be interpreted to identify areas of good practice and areas needing improvement;
13. culture within the university to make judgement based on overall scores on each scale rather than looking at each item;
14. selected reporting in some institutions – highlighting areas performing well and down playing the under performing areas;
15. customising surveys and making it user friendly for diverse groups of students (e.g visually impaired, course offered in a language other than English);
16. lack of accountability in the university in terms of actioning improvements and monitoring; and,
17. communicating survey results with all relevant stakeholders.

### ***Suggested Framework for Survey and Improvement***

The suggested framework presented in this paper is based on the experience of the two authors in managing surveys in five different institutions and extensive research and publications on student experience and student surveys. The suggested framework could also be used in small or large size private higher education providers. Based on literature and the authors' experience, an effective student feedback and improvement framework includes 10 key components.

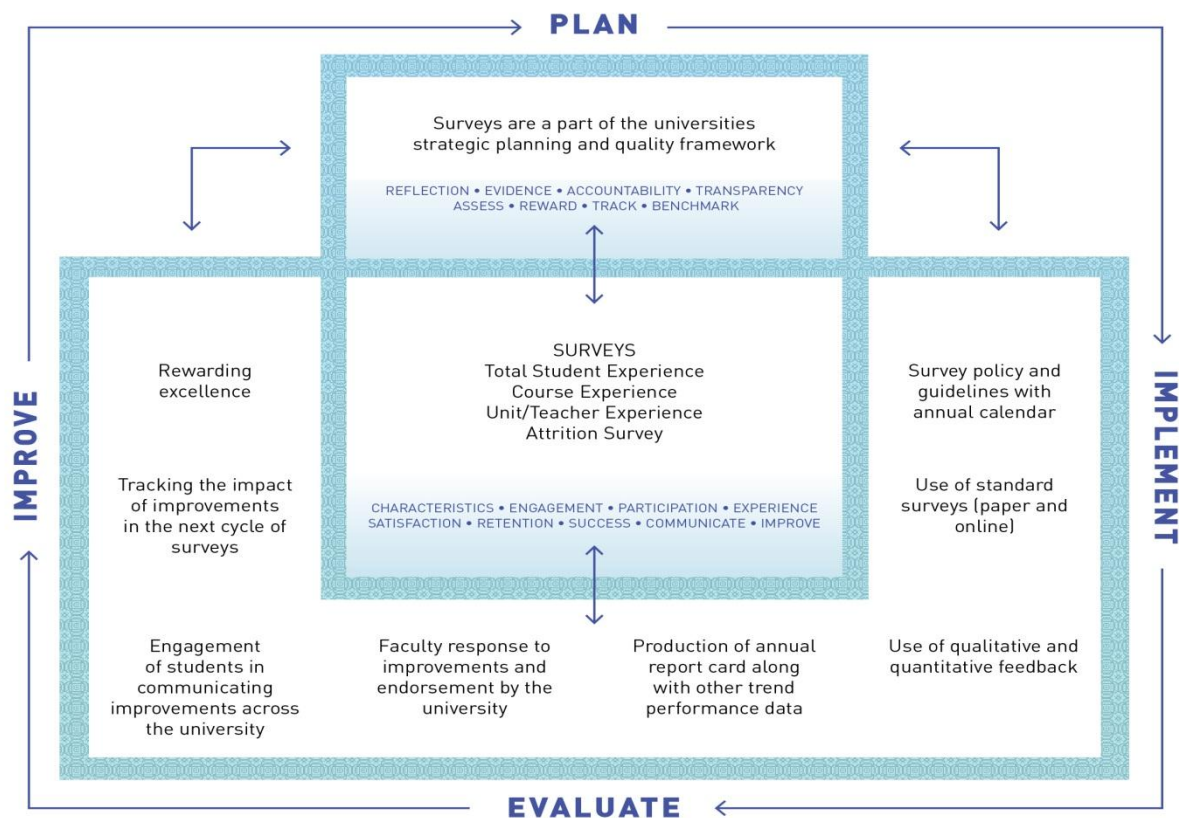
The 10 key components would be based on the rationale that the institution has a range of surveys which measure the student experience at three levels including: *total student experience* in a single questionnaire which is targeted to all undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students and assesses on areas such as: course outcomes, teaching, range of academic support services, library, IT, online learning, campus facilities and campus life. For higher degree research students, a mirror survey could be developed with comparable support services and facilities items and items related to research student supervision, minimum resources, thesis examination and range of programs for research students. *Course level experience* using the annual AGS and Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ) aimed to measure course experience and graduate employment with graduating students. *Teacher and unit level* surveys which are merged as a single survey and are mandatory tools to measure student experience of the teacher and the unit of study. Annual *attrition surveys* are also important to find out the reasons for student withdrawal with the aim to improve first year student retention. The new UES proposed by the government will improve the understanding of first year student experience on a whole range of areas like teaching, student engagement and support services.

As we enter into a demand driven environment where student choice could be based on the performance of the university on *My University* website, it is important for universities to capture feedback from new students on their reasons for choosing to study with the university and understand the characteristics of the university based on student views. Triennial surveys such as *image survey* could be conducted with new students to find out the reasons for choosing a particular university against the competitors.

Apart from the above student surveys, the university may also implement a *biennial staff services survey* which measures staff satisfaction of various staff services. This survey is different from the current voice survey undertaken in universities which measures staff views about leadership, management, communication etc. The use of staff services survey enables the institution to track and monitor the quality of various administrative units.

Figure 1 outlines a general framework for surveys and improvement which could be utilised by all higher education providers. Similar frameworks have been used in three other institutions which have proven to be effective in tracking, monitoring and improving student experience. All three institutions have experienced trend improvement in student satisfaction or experience in all standard surveys 2–3 years after the adoption of a similar framework to listen to student voice and implementing improvement in a timely and systematic manner. These institutions have implemented improvements as a direct result of student feedback and tracked the effectiveness of the improvement in the annual cycle of surveys. Two institutions have also worked closely with various student groups pre and post survey to raise awareness of the importance of student feedback. For example in one university, standard flyers outlining improvements implemented are provided to new students in course prospectus, student orientation, future survey correspondence, and email to all students and staff. Such improvements are also made available in unit outlines (hard copy and online). In another institution a poster campaign is used to communicate improvements with all students. This campaign is a joint initiative between the institution and the student association.

## STUDENT FEEDBACK AND IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK



**Figure 1: Survey and improvement framework**

### Conclusion

Student surveys are one of the many measures of educational quality. In coming years the Australian government will use student satisfaction or experience measures to assess and reward universities and such information will be used on *My University* website for public access. Australia is the only country in the developed economies that uses student satisfaction measures to link performance based funding. In the USA, UK and Sweden, student satisfaction is used by governments to assess student experience; however funding is not linked to outcomes. Government policy on performance based funding using student satisfaction or experience measures require universities to develop and implement an effective framework for survey and improvement which enables the university to prove and improve quality. Such a framework is critical in understanding the student experience of different cohorts of students and ensuring that their experience is comparable and equivalent irrespective of the mode of study or location of study. The voice of students is also important in a competitive demand driven environment where public funding is linked to actual student enrolments. Institutions with a culture of genuinely listening to the student voice, will no doubt improve student experience, student engagement and thus the retention of students.



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## Assuring Graduate Capabilities: An Approach to Determining and Evidencing Standards

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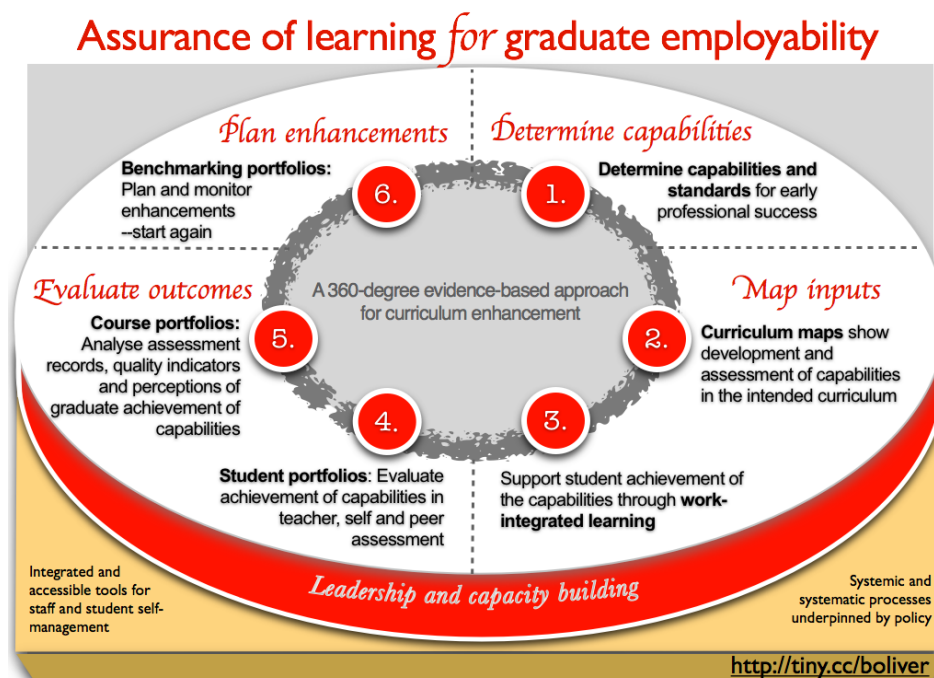
### Abstract

*Assuring standards of academic achievement is central to current policy initiatives within and beyond Australia. There is no one validated way of assuring standards, and institutions are likely to use a range (and probably combinations) of approaches. This paper proposes a proof of concept of an approach, already in the preliminary stages of implementation at Curtin University, based on predominantly formative approaches. In this proposal, course (program) teams draw on national guidelines and frameworks to create course-wide holistic rubrics to articulate and exemplify levels of capability achievement (during a course, at graduation and beyond). These are communicating to stakeholders, particularly students who can use portfolios to gather evidence of their achievements at or beyond the required standards. Subsequently, evidence from this approach may be harvested to inform more granular evidence of course effectiveness.*

**Keywords:** standards, graduate attributes, capabilities, evidence-based, course quality

### Introduction

With the establishment of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and a strengthened qualifications framework (Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2011), Australian higher education providers are required to demonstrate that graduates have achieved capabilities at required standards (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2010). The framework, *Assurance of learning for graduate employability* (Figure 1), suggests that those capabilities are most likely to be achieved through a 360-degree evidence-based approach to curriculum enhancement (Oliver, 2010b).



**Figure 1: The assurance of learning for graduate employability framework**

This means: determining the appropriate standards in specified capabilities; knowing where and how they are developed and assessed in the intended curriculum; evaluating their achievement (based on a range of evidence such as summative and formative teacher, self- and peer assessment, course quality indicators; stakeholder perceptions of graduate performance) and benchmarking, planning and monitoring quality enhancement. Recent research suggests there is intense interest and activity across the Australian higher education sector in specific points on this framework: for example, (1) specifying capabilities (or graduate attributes), (2) mapping their development and assessment in curricula, (3) with a focus on work integrated learning, and (5) interpreting course effectiveness performance indicators. There is less development to date, but growing interest in, (1) specifying standards, (4) collecting student evidence and (6) benchmarking (Oliver, 2010b). This paper describes a current gap in practice (using Accounting as an example), and suggests a process for having course leaders determine standards (aligned with national drivers) at institutional level, and gather and use evidence of standards achievement for quality assurance and enhancement.

### *An Example of the Gap for Course Leaders: Undergraduate Accounting*

Recent studies report that employers, graduates in their first five years of practice, and teaching staff believe that sound written and oral communication skills are important to early professional success, but often not clearly demonstrated (Hancock et al., 2009; Oliver, Whelan, Hunt, & Hammer, 2011). To ensure curriculum quality, course leaders typically have recourse to the new AQF (Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2011) which stipulates that “Graduates of a Bachelor Degree will have ... communication skills to present a clear, coherent and independent exposition of knowledge and ideas” (p.37). The ALTC Learning and Teaching Academic Standards Project has achieved much in terms of achieving consensus among the academic community on standards. The recently published statement for Accounting (Freeman, 2010) indicates that, in relation to communication and teamwork, Bachelor graduates must be able to “justify and communicate accounting advice and ideas in straightforward collaborative contexts involving both accountants and non-accountants” (p. 10). Accreditation guidelines (The Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia and CPA Australia, 2009) stipulate that the undergraduate curriculum must enable to achievement of report and essay writing (p.11). Also, the Accounting course leader is likely to be required to show that all the institution’s published graduate attributes (including communication skills) are clearly identifiable in the curriculum. This example (and similarly for other disciplines) shows the gap in guidance: stakeholders agree that Accounting graduates need good communication skills; however, even though much has been achieved in recent national initiatives, course (program) documentation rarely specifies (1) levels of achievement expected at graduation (how *well* an Accounting student must be able to write, and in which genres), (2) examples demonstrating those levels of achievement, or (3) ways of marshalling evidence of achievement for external agencies. Without this specification, anecdotal evidence suggests that standards are based on individual teaching academics’ beliefs which are often not necessarily articulated or shared with colleagues.

### *An Approach to Addressing this Gap*

This paper proposes a way of addressing this gap: (1) course-wide holistic standards rubrics articulate and exemplify *levels* of capability achievement (during a course, at graduation and beyond) and (2) based on those rubrics, evidence of achievement can be harvested from a range of sources. This will have relevance for summative assessment, but it will also have a strong emphasis on formative assessment which is primarily ongoing and dialogic, encouraging the learner to develop and judge capability. Its use in assuring achievement related to employability is appropriate because it focuses on ‘judging’ (rather than measuring) a wider range of the so-called ‘soft’ capabilities (ethics, teamwork, intercultural understanding), many of which are difficult to measure using summative approaches (Yorke, 2008). This concept involves course teams (course leaders and their teaching colleagues) engaging in activities to achieve these outcomes:

1. Standards rubrics: In consultation with graduates and industry and drawing on graduate attributes, professional competencies and the ALTC threshold learning outcomes, course teams create, share and communicate (with students, industry and peers) course-wide ‘standards rubrics’ which describe and exemplify levels of performance in key capabilities;

## 2. Evidencing standards:

- a) Course teams incorporate their rubrics into *student portfolios* primarily for formative self-, peer- or teacher assessment; and/or
- b) Course teams evidence achievement of the standards (as expressed in the rubrics) in course review portfolios (such as curriculum maps and/or analyses of student assessment performance and quality indicators).

### **Standards Rubrics**

Rubrics communicate criteria for assessment of performance (Stevens & Levi, 2005; Wiggins, 1998). While analytic rubrics can lead to grade discrepancy (Sadler, 2009a; Sadler, 2009b), holistic rubrics are designed primarily to guide judgement (rather than measurement) of overall achievement (Rhodes, 2010; Sadler, 2009b). As descriptors of hallmark performance at key stages, they guide student, peer, and teacher judgments about graduate readiness for professional and safe practice (Chen & Light, 2010; Rhodes, 2010; Stevens & Levi, 2005). The use of rubrics for self-monitoring means that students are prompted to develop the ability to make judgements about quality (Sadler, 2009b). The intention to focus on course-wide standards rubrics is deliberate: unit-based assessment tasks are ‘dis-integrated’, preventing an overall view of the extent to which a student has developed a capability (Yorke, 1998). The idea of creating these course-wide holistic rubrics is not new: the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), to counter the effects of national standardised testing, embarked on a national project to determine a shared set of expectations for learning that staff could use in the classroom, and that students could use to understand and make judgments about their own learning strengths and weaknesses. These shared expectations are expressed through the AAC&U VALUE Rubrics (Rhodes, 2010) which describe levels of achievement in fifteen capabilities (similar to Australian graduate attributes). They are useful *starting points* for Australian course-level standards rubrics, and can be extended to include lifelong learning and employability, incorporating the Dreyfus and Dreyfus categories for adult skill acquisition (Dreyfus, 2004)(templates adapted in this way are available at Assuring Graduate Capabilities; see <http://tiny.cc/boliver>). Australian course teams can choose those most appropriate capabilities for their context, rework and adapt them to suit their needs, refine and validate them in consultation with graduates and industry. Most importantly, they can also add exemplars of hallmark performance, providing models which encourage student learning (Sadler, 2009b; Yorke, 2008). Figure 2 shows a simplified version of the adapted template for Problem Solving.

### **Problem Solving Standards Rubric**

based on the AAC&U VALUE Rubric, with suggested adaptations including the Dreyfus and Dreyfus categories for adult skill acquisition (Dreyfus 2004)

Stage	Expert	Proficient	Competent	Beginner	Novice
	experienced professional	new professional	ready to graduate	mid-course student	beginning student
Define Problem	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]
Identify Strategies	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]
Propose Solutions/ Hypotheses	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]
Evaluate Potential Solutions	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]
Implement Solution	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]
Evaluate Outcomes	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]	[text descriptor]
Exemplars of hallmark performance	[text, image, audio, video]	[text, image, audio, video]	[text, image, audio, video]	[text, image, audio, video]	[text, image, audio, video]

**Figure 2: An example of a template for creating a standards rubric**

### *Evidencing Standards of Achievement*

The standards rubrics will have several purposes. For example, a course team might audit all assessment tasks in a degree program to see where the levels of achievement are formally assessed, then address any gaps or overlap. The course-wide standards rubrics could also be used as a basis to guide the derivation of marking criteria for individual assessments at key stages of the course. However, the principal intention is to use the standards rubrics as a basis for the collection of two sources of evidence. The first type of evidence is created by students, and largely within a formative assessment approach. Justification for this approach can be linked to Yorke's (2008) description of 'doing assessment differently' in what he calls a 'top down' approach:

The key question that such an approach would pose [to students] is something like 'How have you satisfied, through your work, the aims stated for your particular program of study?' ... A question of this sort opens up the possibility of the student making a case that they merit the award in question, a case that can be made by stressing the profile of achievement particular to the individual ... The question asks for evidence of achievements which could be a mixture of marks or grades for modules of study ... qualitative assessments of performance in naturalistic settings (such as work placements), and claims of achievements that are not formally assessable by the higher education institution but are nevertheless supported by evidence. The making of claims of this sort implies that the student has the relevant information to hand, which would require the collation of a portfolio of achievements (Kindle edition, 6305).

### *Student Portfolios*

Portfolios and progress files are tools that enable students to assume responsibility for demonstrating evidence of achievement in the curriculum and co-curriculum, to reflect systematically on their learning, to demonstrate their learning through text, performance, visual or audio media, and for providers and courses to make judgements about and share evidence of capability achievement (Chen & Light, 2010; Hallam, Harper, Hauville, Creagh, & McAllister, 2009; Hallam, Harper, McAllister, Hauville, & Creagh, 2010; Hallam et al., 2008; Joint Information Systems Committee, 2008; Oliver, 2010a). One of the aims of the initiative described in this paper is to determine how standards rubrics can usefully be implemented within portfolio approaches to student learning where students take responsibility for gathering and synthesising evidence of achievement. Student self-rating of graduate attributes has been recently trialled in Curtin's university-wide portfolio system; results to date suggest that students find decontextualised attributes too generic and abstract (von Konsky & Oliver, in review). Standards rubrics, contextualised to include levels of achievement in disciplines, as described here, may present students with a more compelling incentive for self- and peer-assessment of capability achievement. Self-assessment against clear criteria, such as those expressed in the rubrics, is an activity that can increase student achievement of critical thinking and analytical skills (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Sadler, 2009b). Implementing standards rubrics within student self-managing learning spaces such as portfolios builds on several principles of good feedback practice, including: clarifying what good performance is (goals, criteria, expected standards); facilitating the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning; delivering high quality information to students about their learning; and providing opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). The initiative proposed here also enacts assessment propositions developed in an ALTC national fellowship: 'students and teachers become responsible partners in learning and assessment ... students progressively take responsibility for assessment and feedback processes ... students develop and demonstrate the ability to judge the quality of their own work and the work of others against agreed standards' (Boud, 2010).

### *Course Portfolios: Evidence for Course Review*

Evidence-based course curriculum reviews draw on all available evidence to answer key questions, such as: Is this course curriculum enabling capable graduates? How might the curriculum of this course be improved and its strengths maintained? Typically review evidence is based on analyses of curriculum maps, and quantitative and (sometimes) qualitative indicators, many of which are proxy measures (Coates, 2010; Jones & Oliver, 2008; Towers, Alderman, Nielsen, & McLean, 2010). Evidence of precise

standards of achievement in specific capabilities is scant: maps capture where broad brush attributes are developed and assessed in a course rather than the levels of achievement in those attributes (Oliver, Ferns, Whelan, & Lilly, 2010a). Few indicators gather perceptions of graduate achievement of capabilities from employer and others (Oliver et al., 2010b; Oliver et al., 2011). The initiative proposed here will explore how standards rubrics can be used to generate such evidence and incorporate it into existing and emerging systems. This research will draw on emerging systems in Australia (Jones & Oliver, 2008; Scott, 2010; Towers et al., 2010), as well as those in international contexts, such as the Harvesting Gradebook initiative at Washington State University (Rhodes, 2010).

## Conclusion

Assuring standards of academic achievement is central to current policy initiatives within and beyond Australia. There is no one validated way of assuring standards, and institutions are likely to use a range (and probably combinations) of approaches. Two major initiatives have been recently announced: the Group of Eight Universities will implement a Quality Verification System including external examination (Lane, 2010). A recently-funded proof of concept ALTC grant (A sector-wide model for assuring final year subject and program achievement standards through inter-university moderation, led by Krause and Scott) involves eight universities in moderation of common final year units: external blind peer review of inputs (e.g. outlines, assessment tasks, marking criteria) and outcomes (assessment samples) will assist in determining consistency of standards predominantly through units. Both initiatives focus predominantly on artefacts (assessment tasks, criteria and the awarding marks and grades) associated with summative assessment. This paper proposes a proof of concept of a third approach, already in the preliminary stages of implementation at Curtin University, based on predominantly formative approaches: (1) creating course-wide holistic rubrics to articulate and exemplify *levels* of capability achievement (during a course, at graduation and beyond) and (2) gathering evidence from a range of sources to show that those standards have been achieved. While the focus is clearly on identifying standards in pre-determined capabilities (or graduate attributes), the intended outcome is a holistic approach to enabling capable graduates.

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## **Benchmarking Journalism Courses with a Focus on Graduate Employability: Case Studies from Three Australian Universities**

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### **Abstract**

*Benchmarking is commonly perceived as a key part of quality assurance and enhancement, and universities have had limited success to date in benchmarking, nationally or internationally, in matters concerning teaching and learning. This is partly due to the paucity of comparable quantitative indicators. The challenges are even greater when benchmarking is at course (program) level. As part of an Australian Learning and Teaching Council fellowship (Benchmarking partnerships for graduate employability), a process was designed to enable course leaders to engage in collaborative and confidential benchmarking at course level, with a particular focus on graduate employability (or, more specifically, the assurance of graduate capability development and achievement). Among the 24 benchmarking partners were three course leaders in undergraduate journalism. This paper describes their collective experiences and some of the outcomes of the benchmarking exercise. It also highlights some of the challenges of benchmarking in a discipline where graduates may follow a range of career paths, and where technology means professional practice is evolving at a very rapid pace. Given these underpinning uncertainties, discussions around employability and appropriate graduate capabilities are best had face to face with adequate time for establishing common understandings. This has also been a focused way of building capacity and scholarly networking.*

**Keywords:** benchmarking, graduate employability, capabilities, undergraduate journalism

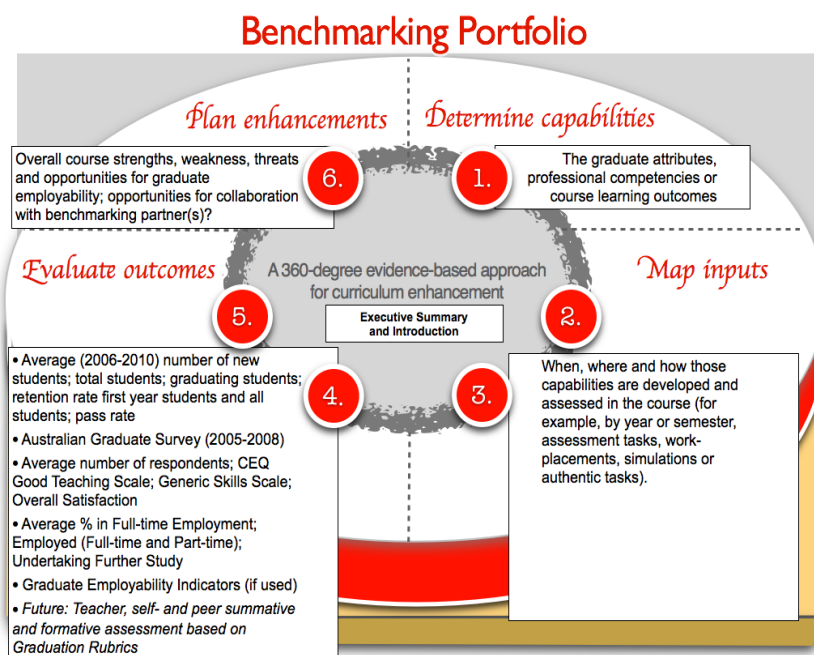
### **Introduction: Benchmarking in Australian Higher Education to Date**

Graduate employability has been defined as enabling graduates to achieve “the skills, understandings and personal attributes that make [them] more likely to secure employment and be successful in their chosen occupations to the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (Yorke, 2006). It has been suggested that such “skills, understandings and personal attributes” are most likely to be achieved through a deliberate and focused 360-degree evidence-based approach to curriculum enhancement (Oliver, 2010). The Australian Government’s recently announced emphasis on standards naturally leads to benchmarking. Benchmarking allows universities to assess their performance and improve their practice (Garlick & Pryor, 2004) in a cyclical process that involves feeding back information for further improvement (Henderson-Smart, Winning, Gerzina, King, & Hyde, 2006), supporting both quality assurance and enhancement (Henderson-Smart et al., 2006). Until about 10 years ago, Australian higher education institutions’ efforts had mostly focused on processes outside of the classroom: it was easier to determine process than quantify the outcomes of practice (Epper, 1999). This is particularly true in relation to teaching and learning: it is generally considered to be a challenging area to benchmark in higher education because of the lack of quantitative measures by which an institution’s performance can be judged.

Since the establishment of the Australian University Quality Agency (AUQA) in 1999, universities have been required to determine what ‘quality’ actually is and take responsibility for the quality of what they do (Henderson-Smart et al., 2006). In 2000, a benchmarking manual (McKinnon, Walker & Davis, 2000) focused on a whole of university approach rather than individual courses (or programs) (Henderson-Smart et al., 2006). The manual was widely used but also criticised for its focus on quantitative data and its competitive approach (Garlick & Pryor, 2004). It was suggested that *collaborative* rather than *competitive* benchmarking was more likely to be conducive to improving quality in higher education (Garlick & Pryor, 2004). The literature also suggests that benchmarking in higher education is most likely to be successful when it is a continuous process of learning from others (Alstete, 1996) ‘owned’ by academic staff and kept relatively simple (Garlick & Pryor, 2004) for internal review and improvement, rather than external accountability (Brown, 1999; Henderson-Smart et al., 2006; Yorke, 2000) or competitiveness (Garlick & Pryor, 2004; Weeks, 2000) and with partners beyond an institution’s usual scope (Epper, 1999). Benchmarking has frequently been mentioned in AUQA audit reports more often as recommendations for improvement (Stella & Woodhouse, 2007). International benchmarking has generally been found to be weak across the sector (Stella & Woodhouse, 2007).

### ***Graduate Employability as a Focus for Benchmarking at Course (Program) Level***

A recent ALTC fellowship focused on course (program) level, confidential and collaborative benchmarking for enhanced graduate employability. The benchmarking process included consideration of a portfolio of reflective (qualitative) and data-driven (quantitative) evidence of course inputs and outcomes (see Figure 1), based on the Assurance of Learning for Graduate Employability framework (Oliver, 2010). In November 2010, 24 course leaders from 13 institutions met to benchmark at course level using this framework. Evaluation of the event showed that, overall, course leaders were very positive about the event format and focus as well as the Benchmarking Portfolio (Oliver, 2010). When asked about issues to be addressed for such benchmarking to be effective, course leaders suggested: working with professional associations; the identifying standards, benchmarking less vocationally-defined courses, and using the outcomes of the process to improve subsequent practice. Within the broad discipline cluster of Communication, course leaders of three undergraduate journalism courses engaged in this benchmarking process—at the Melbourne event (Curtin and Deakin universities) and in a one-off meeting later in 2010 (Curtin and the University of Queensland). This paper reports on those course leaders’ experiences, perspectives and future intentions in relation to the specific context of journalism.



**Figure 3: The benchmarking portfolio based on the assurance of learning for graduate employability framework (Oliver, 2010)**

### ***Benchmarking Undergraduate Journalism***

Reviews of the literature have identified intersecting streams of research over the past fifteen years (in Australia as well as the UK and USA) relating to journalism education and graduate employability (Callaghan & McManus, 2010). There have been studies of changing practices in newsrooms and reflection on how journalism education should respond to these (Macdonald 2006; Harcup 2011a; Greenberg 2007; Niblock 2007; Nolan 2008; Josephi 2007; Skinner et al 2001). There has also been research on employer perceptions of journalism graduate skills and whether universities are satisfying employer requirements and perceptions of 'job-ready' graduates. Evidence from journalism employers seems to consistently indicate that they are more concerned with graduates having "traditional journalism skills, such as good writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation, general knowledge and understanding of ethics" and that "digital skills remain the poor cousin" (Callaghan and McManus, 2010). However, there are few industry and tertiary education forums in Australia debating graduate employability into the future and the role universities might play in shaping this. The Journalism Education Association Australia is currently undertaking a review of benchmarking agencies globally to assist journalism schools across Australia respond to the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Learning and Teaching Academic standards project which was established to facilitate and coordinate discipline communities' definition and implementation of academic standards. Key to this process is engagement with all stakeholders including employers and key international educational bodies. Previous to this, there has been discussion but little agreement on the role of university journalism courses: ought they produce 'job-ready' graduates specifically for journalism jobs, graduates who can work in a wider field of media-related jobs, or broader-based graduates with thinking, research, communication and analytical skills relevant to a range of jobs (for example, media, law, research, politics, public policy)? This debate is increasingly informed by the realisation that there are far fewer jobs in journalism than there are in the wider public communication industry and that offering students "multiple career paths" from journalism study may be desirable as "students entering journalism courses are not being groomed exclusively for one profession" (Callaghan, 2011).

The uncertain career future of journalism graduates is one challenge in relation to graduate employability. Two other key issues complicate the principle of benchmarking, and these relate first to students, and secondly to staff. Congruent with the conclusions of Bennett and others (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008), students enter journalism programs with multiple and disparate literacies: in media and information literacy; technical literacy and critical literacy. Reaching a set of defined graduate employability capabilities poses enormous challenges not only for the practice-focused part of the curriculum, but also for the accompanying contextual studies. At one benchmarking partner institution, this has been addressed by the development of off-curriculum technical training provided in both face to face and online modes, by expanding the range of internal opportunities for the publication and broadcast of student work, by redeveloping the internships program to cover a wider range of work integrated learning opportunities, and by ongoing dialogue with employers about the program. Moreover, behind this matrix of capacities lies the question of differing notions of journalism – or journalisms – and a lively debate within and beyond the academy on this subject. Implicit in that debate is the key issue relating to staff. More specifically, the issue pertains to the sort of people the academy needs to resource the development of academic programs that address the existing and emerging journalisms (Harcup 2011a, 2011b).

### ***Benchmarking Case Studies***

Journalism course leaders in the benchmarking exercise described in this paper were volunteers who had all expressed an interest in the benchmarking process. In preparation for the event, they were asked to prepare a benchmarking 'portfolio' for their course. This involved consideration of a combination of 'soft' evidence (course team reflections) and 'hard evidence' (CEQ, GDS, and similar indicators, as well as the option to use the new Graduate Employability Indicators) and engaging with their course teams and other appropriate stakeholders. These provided the foundation for discussion at the benchmarking meeting. However, discussions were organic. The parameters for discussion ranged from outlines of the framework of each course, a profile of the student cohort, related and intersecting disciplines, relationships with industry, different assessment strategies and work integrated learning options. There

was an essential and very constructive sense of participants feeling for points of similarity and difference in listening to the descriptions of each other's courses and from this, some concentrated discussion on common issues and challenges. One of the striking lessons for all participants was the wide variety of approaches within courses towards achieving common teaching goals and the acknowledgement by each course leader of difficulties with a variety of constraining factors in achieving success. In short, no-one believed they had yet got it right and everyone was interested to hear of how different approaches had fared.

The Journalism course leaders in the benchmarking exercise were generally very positive about the benefits of sharing knowledge, opinions and experiences of different learning and assessment strategies collegially, rather than developing curriculum in isolation as competitors. However, like their colleagues in the broader discipline clusters, they found there were few common denominators. Graduate Attributes offered a language by which they could describe what they aimed for, but the interpretation of attributes was highly subjective. This confirmed the need for benchmarking exercises to include qualitative as well as quantitative indicators, and preferably face-to-face conversations to fully explain diverse understandings and approaches.

Another challenge, described above, led to the inevitable question about the nature and purpose of a university education, the role of the university in preparing and judging graduates' 'fitness for purpose' in relation to employability, and the risk of becoming reactive to external indicators instead of proactive in terms of educational outcomes. This is underpinned in journalism, as it is in many other fields, by the diverse and changing destinations of graduates, as well as the rapidly evolving practice of journalism in the workplace. As one course leader stated:

We are all intensely focused on graduate employability as journalism educators, but there are some significant problems we face in this discipline. The digital age is changing the journalism workplace at a breathtaking pace – and most journalism educators at university have been out of the industry for a while. So, there are dangers that journalism educators could be out-of-touch with modern practice and may be ill-equipped to predict changes in working practice in newsrooms. There is a strong argument that there are some core elements of journalism that are timeless (researching, verification, interviewing, writing and communicating). However, we need to focus on whether teaching these alone will be good enough to ensure graduate employability over a career spanning the next 40 years.

This also led to the inevitable discussion about the appropriate employability attributes such as critical skills which enabled students to ask better questions, practical skills that enable students to be job ready and the character traits required to be a good journalist (for example, being inquisitive or curious). Further, once the desired attributes were clearer, there was a great need to determine the standards required, and this would largely depend on work achieved through the ALTC Learning and Teaching Standards (LTAS) project (Australian Teaching and Learning Council, 2010). Standards rubrics and more qualitative indicators through portfolios of work (covering common themes) were identified as two strategies that might address these challenges.

There was a common perception of a greater need to engage more with industry: one course leader felt that the fact that employers were the most difficult to persuade to complete the online Graduate Employability Indicators probably showed the need to work even harder at engagement with employers. Course leaders also reported challenges such as meshing internal and external benchmarking and quality processes, finding appropriate institutional partners with and beyond Australia, and, in addition to ensuring graduate outcomes, also making sure the student experience during the degree met student expectations.

## Conclusion

The enthusiasm and openness of benchmarking course leaders described here showed the professional development and curriculum quality potential of such activity. That benchmarking partnerships were confidential, collaborative and at course level seems to have struck a chord with participants who appeared to appreciate the time and opportunity to have an evidence-based and somewhat guided, if rather broad-ranging, conversation with peers. In spite of the challenges, the benchmarking has already had impact in that course leaders have changed assessment practices, have had positive feedback from their home institution colleagues, and some are subsequently embarking on whole of course (program) curriculum renewal initiatives. One of the challenges of benchmarking at course level is that there are few indicators in common across the sector. The process described here enabled course leaders and their teams to explore curriculum enhancements with trusted partners. The development of trust in benchmarking partnerships will be key to the likelihood of this 'willingness to share' continuing in a fully contestable environment, as Australia moves towards a fully deregulated university system in 2012. As with the journalism courses involved in this benchmarking initiative, it is perhaps most likely that successful partnerships will emerge between cognate disciplines in universities in different states, which are not in direct competition for students. Universities within the same state may also emerge as trusted benchmarking partners if they seek to focus on the enhancement of points of differentiation, as universities seek to agree 'compacts' with government which highlight their distinctiveness. This may go some way towards building collaborative networks as well as scholarly, evidence-based reflection on the outcomes of teaching and learning.

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## University Ranking Model: Depicting Teaching Quality as a Critical Factor

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### **Abstract**

*Global university ranking systems rely heavily on research output and research quality just like it does on reputational surveys. During the last two decades, universities have shown more inclination to hire PhD faculty members having sound research credentials. This global effect of over-reliance on research has actually undermined the actual spirit of teaching and learning. Consequently universities are more concerned with their prestige compared to what they actually contribute in teaching and learning. Similarly employers and policy makers rate ranking, prestige and reputation of university on top. Research output is so much publicized in universities that it shadows actual teaching quality. Teaching and learning aspect is over-shadowed by research in almost all global ranking systems. How much difference a university creates starting from admission of students till graduation is generally missing in measurement of academic quality by ranking bodies.*

*Dill and Soo (2005, p. 507) have argued that 'Empirical research suggests that the correlation between research productivity and undergraduate instruction is very small and teaching and research appear to be more or less independent activities'. Astin (1996) notes that research and teaching have negative correlation as substantial time is consumed in research activities, and as a result sufficient time is not given to students for teaching and advising, commitment to student development, use of active learning techniques in the classroom.*

*Following a constructive critique on two main global ranking systems, this paper suggests a university ranking model which is likely to provide more realistic picture of university quality.*

**Keywords:** teaching-research nexus, reputational rankings, measuring teaching quality

### **Significance of University Rankings**

The process of globalization has almost changed life. Higher education has also undergone dynamic changes along with the process of globalization. Internationalization of higher education is the main offshoot of this process. Obviously the business world is most affected by globalization. Business organizations like to attract the finest minds and the best-equipped future leaders. Universities are the chief source of talented people and supply workforce to world's leading companies. This targeting is not limited to indigenous talent; rather the companies are endeavoring to draw right people and right partners from all over the world to further their business objectives. Consequently, what we term as internationalization of education, encompasses competition for best faculty, the brightest students, lucrative research contracts. The idea of 'World Class University' is gaining importance in government, employers, investors, alumni, students, applicants and universities themselves. It goes without saying that without measuring the quality, it is difficult to identify which universities may qualify for a world-class university. The main objective of ranking of universities is to actually disseminate information amongst stakeholders about high quality education providers. Most of the ranking systems prevalent today have started off with the sole notion of identifying world-class universities. Of course the methodologies and the processes of these rankings are different but underlying philosophy is the same. Today, even in the under developed nations, university ranking has become common in higher education. Parents, applicants, employers and Alumni are convinced about university rankings.

### ***Critique on Global Ranking Systems***

For the sake of discussion and critical analysis, this paper depicts two main global ranking systems i.e. Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) Rankings and Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) Rankings. Although these two represent two very different purposes, the focus of both rankings is quite comparable: both place the heaviest emphasis on research prestige as measured by quality faculty, amount of university resources, and publication citations (Dill, 2006).

Global ranking systems especially SJTU and THES-QS ranking systems have strong tilt towards research output, number PhD faculty, characteristics of student intake and reputation of the university. Peer review of THES is heavily biased towards university reputation and it may also become whimsical approach as the experts/peers rate universities primarily through their own judgment. The negative impact is that universities already enjoying good reputations keep on hitting top 10 or 100 every time, and it becomes very difficult for new comers to break through this barrier. This methodology may hold good for ranking only best known universities/HEIs.

‘Rankings are also heavily biased towards input measures like educational expenditures per student, student/faculty ratio, faculty salaries, percentage of faculty with the highest degree in their field, research productivity, size of library or admission selectivity’ (Dill and Soo, 2005). Measures like student selection at the time of admission like high scores in international tests do not really determine as to what value has actually been added by the university. Thus, this measure, when included in ranking system, may have prejudicial effect on results.

### ***What is Missing/Insignificant?***

The direct measure of teaching quality and student learning has not been given the due importance which it deserves in most of the global ranking systems. Although teaching and learning is very important part of process and it directly influences the value-addition, yet its direct measure in ranking systems is either missing or leaves lot to be desired. Dill and Soo (2005) argue that ranking should focus on whether research is linked with student learning, and input measures like faculty, students, and resources should be given minimal weight. THES-QS global ranking gives 40% weight to peer review which is actually conducted through surveys. That’s probably why that top 10–20 universities are consistently getting top ranks over a period of time. The negative effect of this sort of reputational ranking is that employers and other related stakeholders may rely heavily on value of degrees from top ranking universities, without actually measuring the learning or real value-addition in knowledge and skills of graduates.

Kuh (2003) argues that alternative to input indicators would be measures of the teaching and educational process. Marginson (2007, p.140)) states that ‘Regardless of whether ranking based on reputational data or not, any system of global rankings tends to function as a reputation maker that entrenches competition for prestige as a principal aspect of the sector and generates circular reputational effects that tend to reproduce the pre-given hierarchy. Reputational rankings are the worst form of ranking, in that they generate the least public goods and most public bads, and the most selective distribution of private goods. At the same time, they are accessible, appear credible and are easy to generate’. It is then quite understandable that students are more concerned with the status of their degrees than what they learn.

### ***Teaching-Research Nexus***

Global rankings rely heavily on research just like it does on reputational surveys. During the last two decades, universities have shown more inclination to hire PhD faculty members having sound research credentials. The Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan has gone to the extent of fixing number of research papers in selected journals as one of the eligibility criteria for professorial rank. This resulted in shunting out professionals working in industry from entering in professorial ranks. This tilt towards research has produced a competition, especially in Pakistan regarding number of PhD faculty members in a particular university. It is more acute in private sector universities. Brand images of universities are now relying heavily on PhD faculty and their research work. This global effect of over-reliance on research



has actually undermined the actual spirit of teaching and learning. Consequently universities are more concerned with their prestige compared to what they actually contribute in teaching and learning. Similarly employers and policy makers give preference to the repute and status of the university instead of gauging the value-addition made by the institution of higher learning.

Dill and Soo (2005, p. 507) have argued that ‘Empirical research ... suggests that the correlation between research productivity and undergraduate instruction is very small and teaching and research appear to be more or less independent activities’. Astin (1996) notes that ‘research and teaching have negative correlation as substantial time is consumed in research activities, and as a result sufficient time is not given to students for teaching and advising, commitment to student development, use of active learning techniques in the classroom.’ Research output is so much publicized in universities that it shadows actual teaching quality. For instance best research papers are replacing best teachers, and as a result a new trend is emerging in at least Pakistani universities that teaching and research tracks are different and so would be the pay packages with much of the bounty going to active researchers. We see that in both THES and SJTU rankings research output heavily outweighs the aspect of quality of teaching. So if teaching-research nexus is small or negative as inferred by the aforesaid researches then the methodology of university ranking systems, which gives lot of weight to research, needs to be revisited.

### ***Evolving a University Ranking Model***

Now, how to cover up the missing aspects like teaching quality and student learning in a ranking model? Of course it is not easy to measure teaching quality and student learning; that is why this paper has projected the idea of ‘evolving’ a ranking model; and this also needs to be tested. First of all let us try to tackle measurement of teaching quality. Marsh (1987) reports, that ‘there is agreement between lecturers and students on the characteristics of good teaching in higher education.’ Ramsden (1991) says that student evaluation of teaching quality is a direct measure of consumer satisfaction, provided systematic student evaluation procedures are in place. One of the ways is to devise an evaluation instrument which focuses upon the effectiveness of teaching and impact on student learning rather than information about individual teachers’ performance. Students are probably the best judges to ascertain the quality of teaching as it directly affects their learning. ‘Students are rarely misled into confusing ‘good performance’ with effective teaching’ (Marsh, 1987). The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) designed by Paul Ramsden (Ramsden, 1991), identified five scales/indicators upon which teaching quality could be measured. These scales have also been tested in 13 HEIs on undergraduate students of final year. These are:

1. **Good teaching:** Teaching staff here normally give helpful feedback on how you are going.
2. **Clear Goals:** You usually have a clear idea of where you are going and what’s expected of you in this course.
3. **Appropriate Workload:** The sheer volume of work to be got through in this course means you can’t comprehend it at all thoroughly (negative).
4. **Appropriate Assessment:** Staff here seem more interested in testing what we have memorized than what we have understood (negative).
5. **Emphasis on Independence:** Students here are given a lot of choice in the work they have to do.

Following ranking model is suggested which incorporates the critical factor of ‘teaching quality’; however, to ascertain teaching quality it is proposed to initially follow Paul Ramsden’s indicators mentioned above.

**Table 1: Proposed ranking model: criteria**

Indicators	Weight
Teaching Quality	30%
Research	20%
Graduate Employability	20%
Faculty	10%
Facilities	10%
Faculty/Student ratio	5%
Alumni winning foreign scholarships	5%

### ***How to Measure Teaching Quality?***

This is actually the measure of student learning and its primary determinant would be student evaluation of course/study undertaken. For university ranking, final year students or students in their final semesters are to be chosen in determining teaching quality. It will be a two pronged assessment:

- Evaluation by Students: 20%
- Evaluation by Alumni: 10%

The instrument (based on Paul Ramsden's CEQ, 1991) of both the aforesaid evaluations is outlined as under:

**Table 2: Survey instrument**

Sr.	Criteria	Scale
1.	<i>Good teaching</i> : Does teaching faculty here normally give helpful feedback on how you are going?	1 2 3 4 5
2.	<i>Clear goals</i> : Do you usually have a clear idea of where you are going and what's expected of you in this course?	1 2 3 4 5
3.	<i>Appropriate workload</i> : Does the sheer volume of work to be got through in this course mean you can't comprehend it at all thoroughly (negative)?	1 2 3 4 5
4.	<i>Appropriate assessment</i> : Does teaching faculty here seem more interested in testing what you have memorized than what you have understood (negative)?	1 2 3 4 5
5.	<i>Emphasis on independence</i> : Are students here given a lot of choice in the work they have to do?	1 2 3 4 5

The feedback is measured on a scale of 1–5. Score of each criterion given above shall be added, and termed as Total Value (TV); then TV is divided by total number of responses multiplied by maximum scale score i.e. 5; and then this figure is multiplied by assigned weight to arrive at a numeric figure/score in these criteria. Mathematically it can be written as:

$$\{TV / [\text{total number of responses} \times 5]\} \times \{\text{assigned weight}\}$$

It can be exemplified as under, suppose there are total 250 responses from final year students in all with following distribution:

85 give 4 score in i); 66 give 3 in ii); 45 give 5 in iii); 40 give 2 in iv) 14 give 3 in v):

$$TV = 85 \times 4 + 66 \times 3 + 45 \times 5 + 40 \times 2 + 14 \times 3 = 885$$

$$\text{Total number of responses} \times 5 = 250 \times 5 = 1250$$

$$\text{Score} = [885 / 1250] \times 20 = 14.16 \text{ out of } 30$$

Measurement of rest of the criteria may not be as intricate as that of teaching quality, so universities may rely on their own methodology.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that the real aspect of teaching quality and student learning is either missing or it is overshadowed by factors like research and reputation. An effort has been made to make up this deficiency by suggesting a university ranking model, also providing an instrument to measure teaching quality; however this model needs to be tested before adopting.

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## **Engaging with Quality: Quality Assurance and Capacity Building in Private Higher Education**

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### **Abstract**

*The Australian higher education sector consists of public and private universities, self accrediting institutions and more than 170 private higher education institutions who offer and confer qualifications at various levels. The private sector for the last three years has experienced a consistent growth of enrolments of 23%. While the private sector has the potential for significant growth, there seem to be lack of planning and policy directions by the government on the role of private higher education in meeting the government's current access and equity aspirations. The growth of the private sector has also witnessed issues around quality and standards based on the outcome of more than 35 audits conducted by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA). The findings of the quality audit raises the question on the extent to which quality and standards in private higher education are comparable to those in universities.*

*The paper analyses the growth of private higher education and discusses the emerging issues around quality and standards and extent to which private higher education provide access and opportunity which may not be offered by traditional universities. Included in the paper is the analysis of recurring themes from the 35 audits conducted by AUQA on private higher education providers on areas needing improvement. Finally the authors outline ways by which private colleges could improve quality management and strengthen capacity building.*

**Keywords:** private higher education, quality management and capacity building

### **Introduction**

The Australian tertiary education sector comprises 36 public universities, three private, one foreign university, four self-accrediting institutions and more than 170 private higher education institutions (AUQA, 2010) that offer and confer qualifications at all levels in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). These qualifications hold equal legal status equivalent to that of university degrees based on the *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes 2007* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007). The tertiary education sector also includes many publicly-funded Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes, which have traditionally offered vocational courses and are now providing higher education courses. The tertiary sector has more than 4800 private and community-based registered training organisations offering vocational qualifications, with some also offering higher education courses. This paper is based on private higher education which includes for-profit and not for-profit higher education providers only.

In 2008, the total student participation in private higher education was 64,092 (6%). This number was as a result of a 20.8% growth that year. Further, the growth has been exponentially high; 92.6% growth in 2007 compared to 2006. By comparison, the growth in Australian public universities was 2.6% in 2008 and 2.1% in 2007. In the first semester of 2009, the number of commencing domestic students in private higher education was 23% higher than the first semester of 2008; in comparison to 6.6% growth over the same period in public universities (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009).

Australia is not alone in the experience of growth of private higher education. Growth has been observed in Europe, North America, Asia, Africa and the Indian sub continent (Gupta, 2008). For example, the private sector caters for more than 70% of students in India, Malaysia, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and Philippines, more than 30% in mainland China, more than 15% in Thailand and Vietnam (Gupta, 2008) and 9.3% in New Zealand (Xiaoying and Abbott, 2008).

A number of external drivers have contributed to the rise of private higher education in Australia: government policy; the growth of higher education; decreased public funding for higher education; student choice; and unmet demand (Shah and Brown, 2009; Shah and Lewis, 2010). Until 2009, the Australian government's skilled migration policy was pivotal to an increase in international student enrolments especially in courses/professions on the Skilled Occupation List (Birrell, 2009). This policy resulted in the formation of new private vocational and higher education providers with a huge reliance on international student income based on occupations in demand.

Across the world, traditional universities are losing their monopoly with large numbers of private institutions entering higher education. For example, research in Poland report private higher education is more responsive to the demands of the economy, tends to operate more efficiently and that, these institutions were better able to meet the higher education needs of these societies (Jalowiecki, 2001; Galbraith, 2003).

### ***Quality and Standards in Private Higher Education***

The growth of private higher education across many parts of the world has raised concerns about the quality and standard of education. For example, according to Mok (2009), quality issues surrounding private higher education have resulted in student protests in China about excessive student fees, the quality of teaching, the status of the degree being offered and a mismatch between promises and reality after graduation. Similar observations have also been made in Malaysia, Singapore and Poland (Jalowiecki 2001; Lim, 2010). A review of private higher education in the UK (Universities UK, 2010) indicates that private higher education in the UK will continue to grow, even though the quality and standards are not consistent and range from excellent teaching to fraudulent practice.

In addition, Middlehurst and Woodfield (2004) found that private higher education in Jamaica, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Bulgaria are expensive compared to public universities and they have limited support arrangements to help students in learning. The study also reported employer's complaints about the quality of graduates from local colleges in Jamaica and Bangladesh for their lack of communication, problem-solving, and teamwork skills, poor quality training and the market relevance of their courses.

Multi-country studies into higher education reforms reveal a convergence in policy on resource allocation, revenue generation, realignment to accommodate new demands, and reorganisation for lower costs, increased efficiency, increased productivity and improved teaching quality (Rhoades, 1995; Slaughter and Leslie, 1999). Lee (2008) argues that government support for the growth of private higher education is due to factors such as: a widening of access and increase in enrolments in the face of increasing government budgetary constraints; meeting the social demand for higher education; letting students pay for tuition; and self-funding by private providers. The experience in Brazil indicates that private higher education brings public benefit at little public cost, as institutions provide their own funding (McCowan, 2004).

However in contrast there is poor government planning in Australia with respect to private higher education. This has brought about significant issues related to quality assurance and standards (e.g. Coaldrake, 2009). Concerns about quality assurance have been raised by the outcomes of external quality audits of 35 private colleges by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and a number of researchers (e.g. Shah and Lewis, 2010; Shah and Stanford, 2009; Shah and Brown, 2009 and Shah and Nair, 2011). Some of the recurring concerns are not only reported by AUQA's own analysis of 20 private

colleges (Winchester, 2010) but as well by researchers (Shah and Lewis, 2010). The recurring areas needing improvement include: inconsistent State and Territory government accreditation and reporting of private colleges; institutional governance; a compliance-led quality culture; poor academic leadership; the use of sessional teachers only and a lack of permanent staff; a lack of research culture; lower admissions criteria; student equity and access issues; poor investment in staff professional development; a lack of academic support structures to help students in learning; poor alignment between growth, resourcing and infrastructure; and a huge reliance on international student income in selected fields of education based on skilled migration policies. Due to alarming concerns in most private colleges, in 2010 AUQA decided to undertake post-audit visits two years after the release of each report to monitor progress on the affirmations and recommendation from the audits (AUQA, 2010).

External reviews undertaken by the two authors in five different private higher education providers suggest that student reasons for choosing to study with private colleges include: the use of leading industry practitioners as teacher who share up-to-date knowledge based on industry trends; the vocational nature of courses with opportunity for students to undertake work experience embedded into the curriculum; small class sizes with an average of 20 students; opportunity to interact and communicate with teachers on regular basis; learning environments and teaching facilities; personalised services where queries and concerns are addressed in a timely manner; second chance for many students who may not have access to tertiary education due to previous education achievement; stepping stone or pathway into a University; flexibility to undertake the courses (e.g. one year diploma, 1.5 year associate degrees, online learning, range of elective subjects, part time and full time study option, courses designed for specific professions and industry).

The experience of the authors in working closely with private colleges clearly suggests that private higher education is playing and could significantly contribute to providing access and pathway for many domestic and international students who do not have direct access to University education. While there are no incentives by the government to reward the access, retention and success of disadvantaged students in private higher education, the sector is playing a key role in social inclusion aspirations of the government. For example, in all five private colleges, 45–48% of students are first in the immediate family to undertake tertiary education; 37–45% mature age students and in one college 68% of students are female. In all five colleges, the vocational nature of course enables students to undertake work experience with employers and building relationship and contacts with them for future employment. These colleges have above 90% graduate employability six month after the graduation in their professional area.

### ***Quality Management and Capacity Building***

The growth of private higher education in Australia and the outcomes of AUQA audit of 35 private providers up until early 2011 signal the need for capacity building in relation to quality assurance. The development and ongoing enhancement of quality is evident in public universities who are accountable for government funding and ongoing reporting to the government on annual institutional performance in a number of areas (e.g. student load; student retention, progressions, student experience, etc.). In comparison, private providers are subject to increased scrutiny by state/territory and federal government compared to universities. The five yearly course and institutional accreditation; compliance to national protocols for higher education approval processes and national code 2007; compliance with commonwealth register of institutions and courses for overseas students (CRICOS); annual reporting to state/territory governments and Australian quality training framework (AQTF) compliance for providers with vocational colleges are some of the many scrutiny experienced by private providers. The suggestions on eight areas of capacity building are based on the experience of the two authors in working closely with private providers.

### ***Compliance to an Improvement-led Audit***

One of the significant limitations of quality enhancement culture in private providers is the compliance driven quality culture (Shah and Lewis, 2010) which is inherent by AQTF and the five yearly

state/territory government registration and accreditation process. The AQTF is a compliance driven ‘tick box’ approach which focuses on institutional compliance on various standards with lack of focus on inputs, processes and outcomes. The lack in rigor in relation to AQTF audits has resulted in the collapse of almost 16 private vocational colleges in the last three years (Healy, 2010) due to poor quality monitoring and lack of risk based AQTF audits. The Bradley review of higher education articulated the voices of many private providers that argued that the current state/territory system for registration and accreditation of courses are problematic due to: time taken to process applications; accreditation panel includes university academics who are seen as direct competitors; inconsistent requirement or interpretation of national protocols in each state/territory; inconsistent annual reporting; compliance complexity and cost for providers who are operating in multiple jurisdictions (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, pp. 117–118).

Shah and Lewis (2010) discuss the need to shift mind set from compliance culture to improvement. While compliance with external regulatory requirements is important, it is evident that there is a real need to ensure that quality management and improvement remain sustainable and are used for the purpose of long term improvement rather than short term ‘tick box’ compliance requirements. For example, conducting poorly constructed AQTF quality indicators survey is seen as compliance to meet AQTF requirements, however if the survey result is effectively used in the college it could enhance the student experience.

### *Leadership*

The development and enhancement of quality in public universities is due to the fact that universities as public funded institutions are able to fund the recruitment of dedicated senior staff with responsibilities related to the quality assurance and the presence of associate deans in each faculty to provide oversight of quality in learning and teaching. Almost all Australian universities have a planning and quality office or similar offices with the complement of 5–35 staff managing planning, quality assurance, reviews, performance reporting, surveys, institutional research and other responsibilities. In contrast, many small and medium size private providers with 300–1000 students are unable to have senior staff and dedicated planning and quality units to coordinate quality management activities. In some small private colleges, the proprietor(s) wear a number of hats such as being a managing director and chief executive officer and also manages other functions such as governance, chair of various committees, finance, human resources and marketing responsibilities. The deployment of dedicated senior staff responsible for quality assurance and other activities such as performance monitoring, reviews, accreditation and surveys may provide further impetus to enhance quality.

### *Performance Monitoring*

Systematic use of data and performance is an important aspect in tracking and improving quality. At present the commonwealth government is unable to report the performance data of private providers on number of areas (e.g. retention, progression, student-staff ratios, etc.) compared to the performance monitoring of universities because of inconsistent state/territory government collection of annual data from private providers (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, pp. 117–118). The presence of both higher and vocational colleges within a private college makes the tracking of performance data complex as there is not only inconsistency in data definition but different measures and reporting. The emergence of quantitative indicators to judge educational quality would require private providers to have effective student management systems which capture store and produce timely analysis and reporting of performance data to various groups.

### *Student Feedback*

The increased reliance on student feedback to measure educational quality requires private colleges to have effective and robust survey management and improvement systems which enables the institution to track and improve performance. Such an approach requires private colleges to have an effective survey framework in place. An example of an effective framework in a large private college has been reported by Shah and Stanford (2009). Included in this framework should be the involvement in the national

Australian graduate survey (AGS) as the current uptake is low, six out of 150 providers participating in the survey in 2008.

#### *Aligning Internal Review with External Agencies Process*

Various studies (e.g. Smeby and Stensaker, 1999; Brennan and Shah, 2000; Kristensen, 2010), suggest that the alignment between internal self review process with external auditing process is proven to be value add and effective in identifying areas of good practice and areas needing improvement. The improvement led audit approach by AUQA is seen value add to private providers compared to the process used is state/territory registration and accreditation process (Shah and Nair, 2011). Such an approach will enable colleges to identify areas needing improvement with an internal culture of reviews, improvement and planning.

#### *Academic Rigor Versus Maximising Profit*

The issue of academic rigor versus maximising profit is an area that needs attention though private providers are dependent on student fees to survive and operate in a competitive market. The notion of academic rigor versus maximising profit is based on the role and responsibility of all education providers to fulfil the moral purpose of higher education by ensuring that education standards and outcomes are comparable with other providers. This will be built on with the on-going quality checks both internally and nationally as discussed earlier. The notion of academic rigor and maximising profit is ensuring that the student growth in private colleges does not comprise quality outcomes and exit standards.

#### *Public-Private Partnership*

The analyses of AUQA audit reports of private colleges suggest that private colleges with public university partnerships or pathway programs have effective quality assurance systems. Shah and Nair (2011), suggest that the oversight of quality by universities and the inclusion of senior members of universities in private college governance committees have been effective in monitoring academic quality. They also suggest that part of the renewal of agreement between universities and private colleges is reviewing effectiveness of quality systems and external scrutiny of university entities by AUQA. Increased public-private collaboration and partnership could improve quality and be mutually beneficial for the sector.

#### *Role of Peak Groups*

The enhancement of quality and capacity building of private providers also lies on the role of key peak groups such as Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET), AUQA and other groups fostering discussion on quality. Key groups such as ACEPT who represent private providers could negotiate national benchmarking on areas of strategic need which could be used in both vocational and higher education.

#### **Conclusion**

Private higher education will continue to grow and play a key role in diversifying higher education. The demand driven student enrolment from 2012 will witness increased competition between universities and private providers. While the sector has grown with an average growth of 23%, there seems to be a lack of clarity on the role of private providers in meeting the government's aspiration to increase participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The rise of private providers in Australia raises the question on whether the sector is the problem or part of the solution to meet the government's target to increase access for disadvantaged students. The statistics show that, as yet, the rise of private higher education has not led to increased participation of disadvantaged students across the sector (Shah and Nair, 2011). The rise of private providers and the outcome of AUQA audits of private providers also raise the question on the extent to which academic standards and student attainment of generic skills in universities, private providers and publicly funded Technical and Further Education (TAFEs) offering higher education are comparable.



The rise of private provider's places challenges on the new Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) to monitor the academic quality of these providers to assure the many stakeholders such as employers, prospective students and the broader community that qualifications issued and academic standards are high and comparable to those offered by universities in Australia. At a time of growth, there is real need to build quality management capacity with a shift in the mind set from maximising profit to academic rigor thus leading to the enhancement and protection of standards of higher education in Australia.

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## Planning and Quality in a Small Higher Education Provider

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### Abstract

*Most discourse on university planning takes place in the context of large institutions, many of which have the resource capacity to support a planning section with specialised computer software and/or can contract external consultants to manager key planning functions. It is not usually feasible for smaller institutions to adopt the same methodology and planning is often added to the list of duties of one or a small number of staff. Christian Heritage College (CHC) has grappled with planning for a decade now and has developed an integrated approach that supports quality assurance by distilling the high level strategic plan into specific activities with timelines and measurable outcomes. This paper describes CHC's approach to planning and compares it to AUQA good practice.*

**Keywords:** planning, mission, action plan

### 1. Introduction

Strategic planning is regarded as good practice universally among higher education providers and is addressed in the context of non self-accrediting institutions (NSAI's) by AUQA (2010). Key issues identified are: the importance of an evidence-based approach, the need for relevance to educational objectives; the need for parsimony (the planning effort should not undermine operational activity); the need for regular data reporting; the importance of treating plans as being evolutionary—subject to change as the operating environment changes; and the need for clearly specified actions with responsibility unambiguously allocated and timelines identified. AUQA (2010) nominated the strategic plan of the Sydney College of Divinity (2010) as a good practice example for NSAI's.

Christian Heritage College (CHC) has grappled with planning for a decade now and has experienced a degree of frustration because most discourse on planning takes place in the context of large institutions. There are some resources available for small business or non-profit organisations, such as Bryson (2011) Duffy and Ritchie (2005) and Charities Evaluation Services (2008). Managance Consulting (n.d.) has developed a simple sample strategic plan template incorporating action plans that is available online, but it would not satisfy all of the AUQA criteria. None of these seems to be quite appropriate for NSAI's in the Australian quality audit context. Other than the AUQA occasional paper there seems to be little to guide small higher education providers.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the planning framework developed by CHC and illustrate how it is being used to advance CHC's mission by means of action planning with measurable outcomes and well-specified timelines. CHC's approach to planning is also compared to AUQA good practice.

### 2. Planning in the Context of Quality Management

CHC identifies student experience as the primary metric by which it judges quality. Thus the focus of the quality management system is student experience, understood as the 'students' total experience of university—not just what happens in the traditional classroom' (Scott, 2006, p. vii) and 'students' involvement with activities and conditions likely to generate high-quality learning' (ACER, 2010, p. 3). Components of the quality management system are illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: The CHC quality management system**

As noted above, the key metric in CHC's quality system is the student experience. The quality of student experience is inherent in three of the six values defined in the mission statement, namely values concerning scholarship, caring for the individual, and transformed lives. These values comprehensively incorporate in-class and out-of-class experience and interest in the whole person.

The planning process is intended to focus the institution on student experience. The mission statement addresses vision ('To be a Christian university'), purpose ('Transforming people to transform their world'), and values ('Christian Heritage College values...') (Packer and Millis, 2010). Strategic planning involves the high-level five-year strategic plan and operational action plans. The strategic plan identifies strategic achievement areas (SAA's) which are broken down into key performance areas (KPA's). Key performance indicators (KPI's) are specified within each KPA and responsibility for each KPI is assigned to an individual or small group. The strategic plan is given operational effect year-to-year via action plans (one for each KPI) that are characterised by activities with measurable outcomes and timelines. Organisation structure is reviewed and adjusted in the light of planning and the quality management system tracks progress in relation to action plan timelines.

Depending on the ambit of the strategic plan each of the areas of 'business as usual'—learning and teaching, community life, student services, and resources—will be affected to one degree or another. (The resources area is always affected because action plans must be resourced via annual budget allocations.)

### **3. A Planning Framework for a Small Organisation**

#### **3.1 A Planning Model**

The planning model is represented in figure 2. The model explicitly integrates long term planning (the strategic plan with a five-year time horizon) and short term planning (the budget with a one-year time horizon). In contrast with many approaches to planning, there is no short term (annual) operational plan as such in this model. This is deliberate and is motivated by past experience and the small size of CHC. In the early days of strategic planning the orthodox approach to short term planning was adopted and each section or department developed its own operational plan. However, operational planning was time-consuming and was not integrated into the annual budget process. The small size of CHC (approximately 1,000 students and annual revenue of \$6 million) means that it is feasible to determine the budget at the whole-of-institution level (there are no budgets for individual schools or administrative sections). Not requiring operational plans reduces the overall planning effort, freeing up staff to concentrate on action plans. It is the budget that brings together all the activities with milestones falling in a given year via funding allocations.

A feature of the model is that each reportable outcome can be mapped back to a SAA. This is done in the relevant action plan (see section 3.2 below).

The planning process mandates reporting six months after Council approves the strategic plan and annual reporting thereafter. Each KPI is rated as ‘achieved’, ‘in progress’, ‘not yet addressed’, or ‘no longer relevant’. The latter would be the case if there is a change in the strategic plan. Changes to the plan are allowed at any time, but must be submitted to Council for approval with a review that establishes the case for the change. Where timelines in an action plan are ‘in progress’ slippage of milestones is noted.

In discussion of quality management in section 2 above it was noted that organisation structures are reviewed in the planning process. One important consequence of the adoption of this approach to planning was that a significant structural development became necessary—the establishment of an Executive (committee) comprising the Principal/CEO, the Chair of Academic Board, the Registrar, and the Business Manager. Council delegated responsibility for implementing, monitoring and reporting on the strategic plan to the Executive. Although there were also other reasons for establishing the Executive, it was clear that the Principal/CEO would not have the time to oversee the whole planning process and that the other three members would need to coordinate activities across multiple academic schools and administrative departments. The establishment of the Executive was a necessary organisation development to support the approach to planning. A cautious approach to any other structural changes was adopted. There were two reasons for this: structural change is itself a process that requires careful management, including management of resistance; and an existing structure should only be changed when such change will facilitate the activities specified in action plans without undermining ‘business as usual’.



**Figure 2: The CHC planning model**

### *3.2 Action Plans*

Action plans are the link between the strategic plan and day-to-day operations in the College. They map activities back to SAA’s, are critical input for annual budget decisions and are the basis for reporting to Council. In order to facilitate cooperation among academic schools and administrative sections, SAA’s were grouped into four functions, namely Academic Development, Student Services and Support, Corporate Services, and Organisation Development. In all cases except Corporate Services, the functions require cross-institutional cooperation. Within the structure of the College, Corporate Services are

provided by the Business Department. In contrast, Academic Development concerns all the academic schools and the Library. Functions will, of course, change with different strategic plans depending on their ambit. Effectively, establishing the four functions creates a matrix structure in which staff have both vertical and horizontal working relationships.

In table 1 an action plan template is illustrated. In the template italics indicate a specific example. For the KPI example in the template the first activity might be for the School Board of Studies (BoS) to develop an information paper for the School Advisory Committee. When this activity is complete, the School Advisory Committee can go ahead and formulate advice to Council. The Executive approves the activity and milestones and, where funding is required, takes responsibility for including an appropriate allocation in the annual budget. The Executive ensures that timelines and milestones are consistent among action plans. This takes two or three iterations. The Executive also maintains a master plan of all timelines and milestones.

**Table 1: Action Plan template**

Strategic Achievement Area (SAA)	From strategic plan <i>Example: Academic Programs</i>				
Key Performance Area (KPA)	From strategic plan <i>Example: Fields of Study</i>				
Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	From strategic plan <i>Example: Seek School Advisory Committees' advice (on potential new fields of study) and report to Council</i>				
Function	From strategic plan function map <i>Example: Academic Development</i>				
Activity or Target	An activity or target consistent with the achievement of the KPI <i>Example: School develops background paper for presentation to School Board of Studies and submission to School Advisory Committee</i>				
Who	The individual (name or position), or group responsible <i>Example: Chair, School Board of Studies (insert name)</i>				
How	The actual 'doing' <i>Example: Desk audit of offerings at universities and other higher education providers, demand analysis (e.g. using <a href="http://www.jobsearch.gov.au/default.aspx">http://www.jobsearch.gov.au/default.aspx</a>), dot point report to Board of Studies (BoS), Board of Studies develops information paper for School Advisory Committee (SAC)</i>				
Milestones	<b>Date 1</b> <i>Complete desk audit Feb 2011</i>	<b>Date 2</b> <i>Complete demand analysis Jun 2011</i>	<b>Date 3</b> <i>Prepare report to BoS Jly 2011</i>		<b>Completion</b> <i>Submit information paper to SAC Sep 2011</i>

### 3.3 Implementation and Initial Review

The current strategic plan was ratified by the CHC Council in November 2010. Therefore, this section is necessarily brief. The CHC Executive has responsibility for overseeing implementation of the plan. The Executive receives action plans and creates a register that integrates activities and milestones from all action plans. At this point in the implementation process one or more iterations are required to ensure that activities are reasonably spread over the five year planning horizon and that resourcing needs can be adequately met from annual budgets. Once the register is established the Executive receives progress reports from relevant heads of section or committee chairs (identified in action plans as 'who'). At the

time of writing the initial six-month review of the strategic plan was in progress. It was evident that there were too many KPIs to manage within staff workloads. These are currently being reduced in number in the expectation that this will allow for more time for ‘doing’ the strategic plan.

#### 4. Comparison with Good Practice

In this section a ‘self review’ of the CHC planning model is developed. The review uses AUQA (2010) and Sydney College of Divinity (2010) as benchmarks. The review is presented in tabular format.

**Table 2: Self review**

<b>AUQA</b>	<b>Sydney College of Divinity</b>	<b>Christian Heritage College</b>
<p>Evidence based</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on fact and data rather than anecdote</li> </ul>	<p>Strategic plan includes Strategic Objectives relevant to this criterion. AUQA (2009) affirmed ‘the intention of SCD to focus on undertaking cyclical reviews built on a culture of evidence, including benchmarking with other theological institutions’ (p. 20)</p>	<p>Not clear in strategic plan, but some KPI’s are expressed in quantifiable terms.</p>
<p>Sustainable and relevant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relevant to educational objectives</li> <li>Sustainable—planning effort should not overwhelm day-to-day operations</li> </ul>	<p>Plan identifies seven Goals and specifies 38 Key Results and 66 Strategic Objectives. All are clearly relevant to the mission statement. This appears to be sustainable given the five-year timeframe of the plan, although there may be some key staff who have to take responsibility for a large number of Strategic Objectives.</p>	<p>Plan identifies seven Strategic Achievement Areas and specifies 32 Key Performance Areas and 62 Key Performance Indicators. All are clearly relevant to the mission statement. This appears to be sustainable given the five-year timeframe of the plan, although a few key staff are responsible for a large number of KPI’s.</p>
<p>Regular reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data reports need to be analysed at least annually, including identification of strengths and areas for improvement</li> <li>Academic Board receives reports on educational KPI’s</li> </ul>	<p>There is no information regarding reporting in the plan. AUQA (2009) affirmed ‘the decision by SCD to develop and implement a Strategic Plan and to identify and report progress against the “Agreed Actions”’ (p. 9). AUQA (2009) also recommended ‘that SCD Council develop KPIs, and SCD Academic Board develop academic performance indicators that provide data to enable the College to monitor an systematically review its performance against the goals of the Strategic Plan’ (p. 9)</p>	<p>Plan states that a progress report will be provided to Council within six months of ratification. After that annual reports on progress will be required. Where working parties are established by the Plan these will report ‘regularly’ to scheduled meetings of Council. Reports concerning the Academic Development function will be submitted to Council via Academic Board.</p>
<p>Ongoing strategy development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic plan is regularly reviewed and developed as the institution evolves</li> </ul>	<p>Plan is reviewed, but regularity of review is not stated. Current version of the Plan is dated 7 August 2010.</p>	<p>There will be an initial review six months after ratification and then the Plan will be reviewed annually.</p>
<p>Action for improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agreed and documented actions</li> <li>Clear allocations of accountabilities, resources and timelines</li> <li>Key dates of the planning cycle incorporated into calendar</li> </ul>	<p>Strategic Objectives in the Quality Assurance Goal identify the development of a culture of continuous improvement, including benchmarking. It is not possible to ascertain from the Plan information regarding accountabilities, resources or timelines.</p>	<p>KPI’s require: annual reporting on quality assurance, academic standards and spiritual formation; reporting once in the planning cycle on community engagement; triennial review of the effectiveness of Council; and benchmarking of IT infrastructure every two years. The Plan identifies accountability for each KPI and notes the completion date of each Action Plan.</p>



It is not possible to comment on actual practice at either SCD or CHC. In the former case there is no published information to allow an analysis to be made. In the latter case, the Strategic Plan has only been introduced in January 2011 and nothing can be added to what has been noted in section 3.3 above. However, based on the table and given the SCD Strategic Plan status as a good practice example, the CHC approach to strategic planning appears to fulfill the requirements for good practice.

### ***Concluding Comments***

The small size of many NSAI's, including CHC, means that planning and quality functions can take up a relatively large proportion of staff time. It is important, therefore, to develop an approach that supports the institution's mission but leaves staff with time for implementation and review. CHC has grappled with these issues for some time. The current strategic plan is congruent with its quality management system and seems to be 'about right' when benchmarked against AUQA criteria for good practice and the SCD Strategic Plan. Importantly, CHC is only at the very early stage of implementing the current strategic plan. It will be interesting to see if the good practice approach is matched by good practice implementation and review.

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## Interpreting Transnational Education Standards: The Locus of Control

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### Abstract

*Under 'National Protocols' established for higher education Australian universities are required to meet a consistent set of standards "regardless of whether its higher education students are located in Australia or offshore." (MCEETYA, 2007, p. 2). In this context we report in this paper approaches to curriculum and assessment decision-making encountered in an investigation of transnational education and internationalisation. The investigation is a component of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) project 'Learning without borders: Linking development of transnational leadership roles to international and cross-cultural teaching excellence'; a project conducted by Curtin University and Swinburne University of Technology in Australia and in Sarawak. Meeting the same criteria specified in the National Protocols onshore and offshore can be and is addressed in different ways, even within the same higher education institution. In this paper we distinguish four approaches to curriculum decision-making designed to ensure the same standards are met. These may be styled: (a) home campus curriculum control, (b) limited branch campus learning, teaching and assessment contextualisation, (c) substantial branch campus learning, teaching and assessment contribution constrained by a requirement to attain the same learning outcomes, and (d) branch campus curriculum design. The locus of control varies between these approaches with implications for both the student experience and the professional experience and responsibilities of staff.*

**Keywords:** transnational education, curriculum quality control

### Introduction

In this paper we explore *what is quality* by examining approaches to curriculum and assessment decision-making encountered in an investigation of *transnational education*. The investigation is a component of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) project "Learning without borders: Linking development of transnational leadership roles to international and cross-cultural teaching excellence"; a project conducted by Curtin University and Swinburne University of Technology. The two universities each have campuses in Australia and in Sarawak and the investigation was conducted in these four locations.

The question we examine here is: how do the universities investigated ensure that their branch campus programs maintain the standards required of Australian universities? We explore ways in which the

answer to this question is linked to the ‘locus of control’ between onshore and offshore teaching staff, which has implications for the student learning experience.

Universities Australia has developed guidelines for delivering programs onshore to international students and offshore to students through partner institutions (AVCC, 2005). The ESOS Act provides a regulatory framework focused on students studying in Australia. The National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes provide guidance on quality assurance and control processes that “apply to all higher education functions of an institution, regardless of whether its higher education students are located in Australia or offshore.” (MCEETYA, 2007, p. 2). These documents do not prescribe how education should be delivered to students in offshore locations; it remains for institutions to interpret requirements. The Australian University Quality Agency (Baird, 2006) and the International Education Association Australia (2008) have, however, provided some guidance for universities by interpreting the requirements of the legislative framework.

### ***Related Literature***

Emerging from the literature are multiple interpretations of policy provisions and guidelines with practices varying within as well as between institutions. Woodhouse and Stella (2008) provide instances. A paper presented to AuQF in 2010 (Sanderson et al., 2010) explored the different interpretations placed on the terms *comparability* and *equivalence* (used in the National Protocols MCEETYA, 2000) when applied to assessment and moderation. Other research (Coleman, 2003; Eldridge, 2009) has highlighted how different cultures can produce variation or inconsistency in the ways in which policy and expectations translate into practice. In regards to this practice, Dobos (2011) discusses the pressures of accomplishing quality assurance on offshore academics, who have to respond to both Australian and local quality audits. Demands of internal quality measures can further complicate the role of an offshore academic, though this often depends on how much autonomy an institute allows. Macdonald (2006) suggests two extremes within institutions: *total control*, in which the program is designed by the Australian institution providing the offshore campus with no autonomy in relation to the content or delivery; and *colleagues in context*, in which the academics at the offshore campus, through collaboration with Australian-based academics, are able to adapt and contextualise a program for local students. A series of case studies (University of Western Australia 2009), provide examples of approaches by Australian institutions that operate somewhere between Macdonald’s diametric approaches. These case studies provide evidence of the variations in practice not only between institutions, but also between programs within institutions.

The approach taken has implications for the student learning experience as well as staff responsibilities. Mazzolini (2010) argues that “Approaches to TNE QA reflect our views of the ‘Australian educational experience’, and can be used to assert ‘control from a distance’, or to support the branch learning experience and internationalise our curriculum.” In order to realise the potential of offshore teachers to assist in internationalising the curriculum, Leask (2004) claims this would involve a reconstruction of roles involving more effective onshore and onshore communication and “a reconfiguring of extant power relationships” (p. 146).

We go on in this paper to describe the forms of relationships between home and branch campus staff that we observed and to reflect on some implications for staff and the student experience.

### ***Research Methods***

The project reported on here has involved data gathering through surveys completed at the Australian and Sarawak campuses of the project partner universities. Individual interviews have also been conducted at these campuses. Conduct of a symposium in Sarawak provided the opportunity for focus groups.

### ***Findings***

We investigated means employed by the participating universities to maintain the standards required of Australian universities in their branch campus programs. Various approaches to quality assurance were

observed between universities, within the same university and on the same campus. We have grouped our observations under four sub headings distinguished by the forms of unit and program coordination and the locus of control adopted.

### *Home Campus Control*

At one end of the ‘control’ spectrum there were approaches that regulated offshore activities closely. One faculty offering programs onshore and offshore provided one such example. For quality assurance purposes all curriculum is developed at the home campus. Unit coordination is undertaken from the home campus only; no one offshore has the role or designation ‘unit coordinator’. Indeed *unit coordinators* in this faculty are sometimes referred to as *unit controllers*. One home campus coordinator stated “As I understand my role, one of my prime responsibilities is to ensure consistency of provision of course materials and course outcomes irrespective of location ... I provide a teaching guide and revision notes. I provide material on *BlackBoard*. I make sure that teachers are on the same page. I provide a marking grid down to half of a mark.” A senior home campus academic explained that the unit coordinators are held accountable for standards as students receive a qualification from the onshore university and to ensure this coordinators need to be “direct employees of the university”. All assessment is set by the onshore university. The marking is done by staff of the home campus or at the least marking schedules are provided and all results are subject to moderation. Teaching activities are mostly driven by the home campus but there is some scope for local adaptation of teaching in tutorials. As one branch campus respondent reported “the Power Point slides and PDF files basically come from [the home campus]. Staff may introduce their way of presenting but by and large the content of the teaching material comes from [the home campus].” Again “the teaching methods are something like handed down. The package came with all the outcomes, assessment, PowerPoint slides and other documents. I went over the whole thing and modified just a little bit”.

This approach to the allocation of responsibilities has raised questions for some branch campus staff: “it requires some adjustment for people like me who have been independent earlier – not very used to getting suggestions from others.” Some branch campus staff in this situation would at least like “feedback on marking.” A home campus unit coordinator, who claimed “I have control of everything and it suits me”, nevertheless suggested “It would be good if we could exchange jobs for a week or two. I could get to know students. The [branch campus] people could see the scale of operation here.” Freedom to adapt may depend on the tenure of staff with more freedom granted over time but that doesn’t always apply. As one home campus coordinator observed “the branch campus staff members have been in position for some time. They have matured but we don’t have the mechanism to involve them.”

Strict home campus control of curriculum, learning resources, learning and assessment activities and marking was found to be adopted where a program was offered through a number of offshore and onshore providers – both public and private – some employing staff on a sessional basis only. The same approach was adopted for all campuses offering the program, including a branch campus. This approach was also adopted in some cases where the only offering outside the home campus was through a branch campus.

### *Limited Branch Campus Contextualisation*

Another observed approach allowed for modest contextualisation by the branch campuses. This could include making suggestions about curriculum content drafted on the home campus, adapting some teaching and learning activities – for example case studies – to suit the local context and local students, and suggesting items for inclusion in assessment. A home campus coordinator reported “One person from [the branch campus] visited for 10 days during curriculum development, intensively going through the units and what he would like to change.” An alternative is moderation visits from the home campus academics where they “hear any problems they have had, changes they would recommend.” As one home campus coordinator acknowledged “the material we may be using here may not be appropriate to their context” so there needs to be some freedom to adapt.

For the most part, cooperative relationships work well. One branch campus respondent reported “The people I work with have been very reasonable. Comments they have given me about the exams I’ve always benefited from, and I greatly value that.” Again, “with teaching methods we stick to learning outcomes but the teaching is up to the teacher. We will contextualise for local context. We need contact [the home campus] when we contextualise.” Another branch campus respondent reported that “staff are free to present it in their own way. The initial information was on global warming for Australia but I asked if we could put in material for Malaysia.”

One branch campus respondent reported that a supposed freedom to make suggestions did not always work out in practice: “I have seen cases where the relationship was not very good and there was a lack of trust. Whatever we proposed they would not agree to.” A home campus respondent also reported: “They have the opportunity for providing feedback but rarely suggest change. Sometimes they have written a question” while a branch campus respondent stated: “I do my own lecture notes and I set my own exams which are moderated but ... I don’t think I’ve had any involvement with curriculum development that’s anything of importance to the unit.”

The key features of quality assurance in this approach appear to be control of the degree of contextualisation together with moderation of branch campus student assessment by the onshore unit coordinator. This may be a review of all student assessment submissions or by sample, for example: “the top 3 papers, 3 average papers and 3 borderline papers.”

Limited branch campus contextualisation was found to apply mainly to units that were classed by one of the participation institutions as ‘ongoing’. It was adopted where there was continuity in staffing and a unit had been offered successfully for one or two semesters.

#### *Focus on Attaining the Same Learning Outcomes*

A further transfer of locus of control to branch campuses sometimes occurred in cases where the program has been offered over a number of years and the staffing is stable. This approach included providing alternative curriculum content elements, learning and teaching activities, and elements of assessment. This involves negotiation; as one branch campus respondent reported: “We work together [with counterparts] and take account of who has most experience in the topic. We gave feedback on the curriculum. The system is basically centralised. Both sides set assessment but both are the same. It gives quality control.” Again: “We redesigned curriculum and assessment between [the branch campus] and [the home campus] ... Under the moderation agreement with [the home campus] we sent samples to Australia. Then an agreement was reached. It was bilateral.” Another branch campus respondent with considerable experience reported “I get some material from Australia, like unit outline, slides, etc., I generally just take it as guideline and I develop my own material, my own unit outline, and then I get approved, get suggestions from my counterpart. Teaching method also, I adopt my own ... [I] do a lot of projects and case-based sessions. I found that the counterpart is not using the same approach. But it doesn’t matter.”

In some cases circumstances also dictate that a unit is offered only offshore during a particular semester. For example one branch campus respondent reported “I’m the only one teaching the course, so I’ve to write up the exam questions as well. I do that with the convenor on this campus.”

Here the key to quality assurance is a combination of requiring the same learning outcomes – where the outcomes may however be attained by alternative means – and moderation of assessment samples.

A high degree of branch campus contextualisation with a focus on attaining the same learning outcomes was found to apply to units that were classed by one of the participation institutions as ‘mature’. It was adopted where there was continuity in staffing and a unit or program had been offered successfully for some years.

### *Curriculum Designed at the Branch Campus*

Finally there were situations where programs or units were developed and offered by the branch campus only, but could contribute to or constitute an accredited award of the home university. For example on one of the Sarawak campuses, Borneo Studies is offered as an elective. Respondents reported: “We do have specific electives units that we have developed ourselves so we are not entirely free of curriculum development responsibilities.” The other Sarawak campus has also accredited two master degrees to be offered only locally, arguably an inevitable trend if branch campuses seek to meet local expectations and student demand.

Here the key to quality assurance involves mature internal quality processes at the branch campus, in addition to those with the home campus. This requires that branch campus staff develop both curriculum development expertise *and* knowledge of regulatory requirements (Australian and local), thereby widening their professional skills set.

### *Discussion and Reflection*

Four approaches to curriculum decision-making have emerged from this study. The approaches are distinguished by the locus of control in relation to decision-making on curriculum, assessment and learning and teaching matters generally.

**Table 1: Curriculum decisions and the locus of control**

<b>Locus of control</b> <i>Areas of decision making</i>	<b>Home campus control</b>	<b>Limited branch campus contextualisation</b>	<b>Focus on attaining the same learning outcomes</b>	<b>Curriculum designed at the branch campus</b>
<i>Curriculum design</i>	Determined onshore	Determined onshore	Determined onshore but open to suggestions from offshore	Determined offshore with consultation and Australian accreditation
<i>Learning and teaching resources and activities</i>	Resources produced onshore and activities determined onshore	Resources produced onshore. Activities may, with agreement be contextualised.	Resources may be produced onshore or offshore. Activities may be devised onshore or offshore	Resources produced offshore. Activities determined offshore
<i>Assessment</i>	Designed onshore	Designed onshore. Some items might be suggested by offshore teachers	May be designed on or offshore. Offshore design subject to approval onshore	Designed offshore with some consultation
<i>Student performance</i>	Marked onshore or moderated onshore	Marked offshore and moderated onshore	Marked offshore and moderated onshore	Assessed offshore within guidelines or moderated
<b>Key features</b>	The unit, learning activities and assessment are the same whoever delivers the unit	The unit and assessment are the same whoever delivers the unit. Learning and teaching activities may be contextualised	Unit learning outcomes are the same. Learning and teaching activities and assessment are contextualised	The program/unit is subject to QA processes consistent with Australian National Protocols
<b>Adopted where</b>	The program is offered through multiple providers OR a unit is offered on a branch campus for the first time or with new staff “new unit”	There is continuity of unit staffing and a unit has been offered successfully on a branch campus for a few semesters “ongoing unit”	There is continuity of unit staffing and a unit has been offered successfully on a branch campus for a number of years “mature unit”	The unit is offered only on the branch campus (though it might be taken by home campus students)

To go back to the challenge raised by the National Protocols referred to in the introduction, meeting the same criteria onshore and offshore can be and is addressed in different ways. Total uniformity is not essential for quality assurance purposes, for example as an AUQA occasional paper states:

Differences in assessment are not inherently problematic. The key issue for quality auditors is not whether the assessment regimes are the same for each location... The key question is whether or not the assessment regimes facilitate equivalent student learning. (Carroll & Woodhouse, 2006, p. 81)

Decisions on the approach to be taken may depend on the maturity of the branch campus operations, but have consequences for the experience of students and staff. In the first 'one size fits all' approach, the learning experience for home campus and branch campus students may not be the same if they cannot relate equally to the context (national, social) in which the curriculum was designed. In this approach, branch and home campus academics do not share the same level of professional responsibilities.

The second approach provides a student experience closer to that of home campus students and widens the professional experience of branch campus staff. The third approach does the same for students but requires staff to exercise professional skills to ensure the same learning outcomes at the branch campus and home campus. The final approach can provide the same sort of experience as students in other locations where the curriculum is designed within their context. This approach requires full professional responsibilities of branch campus staff in ensure that all Australian requirements are satisfied.

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## Student Feedback and its Role in Embedding a Quality Culture

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### Abstract

*Integral to embedding a quality culture in a university is the establishment of a model that, while placing the student at the centre, remains responsive to sub-cultural needs of staff through commitment to collaboration and collegiality. The model at the University of Newcastle works to sustain engagement of staff and students with the meaning of quality through structural and cultural alignment of resources that has seen creation of new policies and procedures, targeted recruitment of staff, and adoption of supportive technology. The quality culture is further embedded through management practices that encourage collegiality and cross-unit cooperation, which have been central to attaining wide-spread ownership of decision-making and in turn, the quality process. Using case studies that describe the development of new student feedback instruments and a new web resource for final year students, this paper will demonstrate how the implementation of our localised quality model has led to improved engagement in the quality cycle, as well as a new attitude towards quality in the assumptions, beliefs, values and conversations of staff and students.*

**Keywords:** quality culture, student feedback

### Introduction

At the University of Newcastle, the focus for our processes is continuous improvement and making the student experience central to the ways we manage the delivery of higher education. This involves an implementation of the quality enhancement cycle that extends beyond data collection and reporting through to improvements that respond to student feedback, that align with the goals of our Strategic Plan and which are sensitive to our strategic landscape.

Implicit in achieving improvement is the necessity for change. Therefore, integral to embedding a quality culture is the establishment of a model that, while placing the student at the centre, remains responsive to sub-cultural needs of staff through commitment to collaboration and collegiality. This approach has been successful in not only creating a “local definition of quality” (Houston, 2008:69), but has also overcome some of the barriers that are encountered when embedding a quality culture in higher education institutions.

Using case studies that describe the development of new student feedback instruments and a new web resource for final year students, this paper will demonstrate how the implementation of our localised quality model has led to improved engagement in the quality cycle, as well as a new attitude towards quality in the assumptions, beliefs, values and conversations of staff and students.

### *Quality in Higher Education Institutions: Background and Barriers*

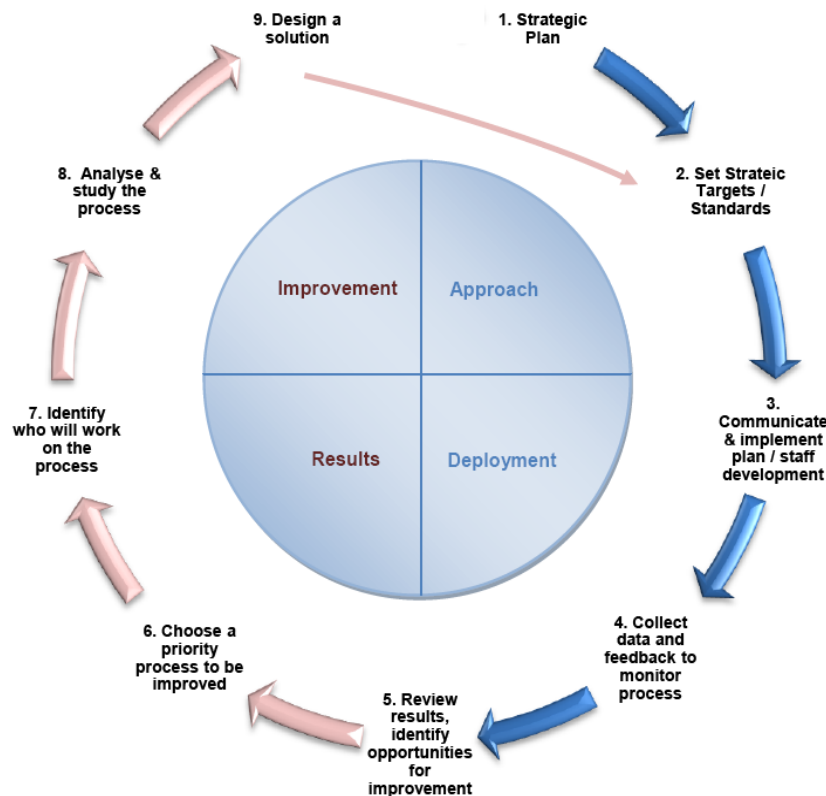
The transference of quality management models from industry to higher education has not been without its difficulties (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2002). The introduction of quality processes is seen to be at odds with academic notions of professionalism and there has been antipathy towards perceived



compliance burdens (Cheng, 2011; Anderson, 2006). Contributing to these attitudes has been a reluctance by academics to be ‘assessed’ by quality professionals who sit outside their discipline (Cheng, 2011) and the criticism that there is little likelihood that such processes will bring about any meaningful change (Anderson, 2006). These barriers are often further fragmented at the sub-cultural level by the degree to which these sub-cultures are threatened by change, or indeed, consulted and challenged (Houston, 2008).

This situation is not helped when quality practices in institutions focus on accountability and assessment, rather than improvement. That is, the transformative nature of quality enhancement, which looks to the future, is impeded by a focus on the immediate past (Lomas 2004).

Consequently, the quality enhancement cycle (see Figure 1), which should extend beyond the approach, deployment and results quadrants, rarely comes to fruition without a strong ‘bottom-up’ reflective focus on quality, as well as ‘top-down’ structural reinforcement (Harvey & Knight 1996). In other words, high-level planning, communicating the plan, collecting data and feedback tends to fragment as results are interpreted and filtered at the local sub-cultural level, and which often acts as “a brake on change” (Houston, 2008:75).



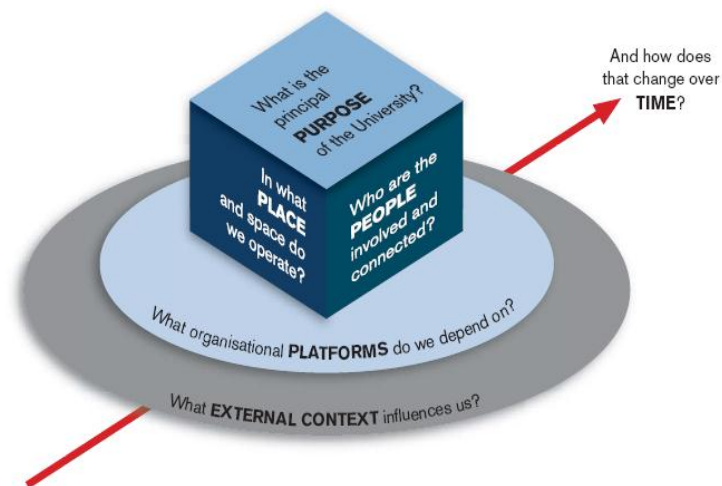
**Figure 1: The quality enhancement cycle**

### *The Nature of Quality at the University of Newcastle*

The nature of quality at the University of Newcastle recognises the strategic landscape within which universities operate (see Figure 2). Houston (2008) points out that “real appreciation of quality issues requires exploration of what the university is, and should be like” (69). Quality processes must transcend conforming to accountability requirements, and instead look to the core processes that determine “how can we do better towards achieving our purpose” (Houston, 2008:69).

The purpose of the University of Newcastle, as identified in the Strategic Plan *Building Distinction: 2011–2015*, is to “make a difference to the lives of individuals and to society”. A key strategic priority to achieve this purpose is “promoting and improving a positive student experience and quality teaching and

learning”. The approach adopted by the University of Newcastle is best described as a blend of a ‘transformation’ model and a ‘responsive’ model. A transformation model places emphasis and value on “enhancing participants, adding value to their capability and ultimately empowering them”, in particular through transparency, integration and collegiality (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2002). A responsive model takes into account changes in student demands, resource shortfalls, socio-cultural diversity and the overall evolving purpose of the university to name a few (Tierney, 1999).



**Figure 2: The University of Newcastle's strategic landscape**

Furthermore, our model works to sustain engagement of staff and students with the meaning of quality through the ‘tight-loose’ structural and cultural alignment (Harvey & Knight 1996) of resources that has seen creation of new policy and procedures, targeted recruitment of staff, and adoption of supportive technology.

Policies for student feedback, annual program reporting, external program reviews, and organisational reviews have been reviewed and adjusted under the rubric of quality enhancement. Individuals, who have a collegial consultative style, are experienced in the sector and who understand the cultural challenges facing this environment, were employed to drive quality improvement projects. Likewise, IT systems have been reviewed and enhanced to ensure they can meet the demands of a quality culture (see case study one).

This is further embedded through management practices that devolve responsibility to employees to create their own solutions, but within an overarching framework (Harvey & Knight 1996), has encouraged collegiality and cross-unit cooperation, which have been central to “narrowing the cultural divide” and attaining wide-spread ownership of decision-making and in turn, the quality process (Poole, 2010:14).

The University's overall approach is illustrated by two case studies that focussed on maximising the value of student feedback.

### ***Case Study One – Maximising the Value of Student Feedback***

#### ***Context***

Our approach to developing a quality model is exemplified by the consultative process that was followed at all stages of the revision to student feedback processes. The review was supported by stakeholders who reported that existing processes were inadequate in providing meaningful quantitative and qualitative

information about where and how to make changes to improve the student experience. During 2008 and 2009, the content, design and administration of the Student Feedback on Courses (units of study within a program) survey were revised. The surveys were made available online, students were given the opportunity to provide open-ended comments and a team was recruited to manage the process and maximise the value of the information to make real changes.

### *Approach and Process*

The process involved direct interaction between students, academic, administrative, learning and teaching and IT staff, and the Senior Leadership Team. Staff were recruited into the Planning, Quality and Reporting unit who had an academic background and who understood the challenges that academic staff were facing in the move to a more evidence-based assessment of the quality of teaching and learning. Among other things, this had positive affect in narrowing the cultural divide between teaching professional and quality professional. This collegial approach flowed through to the testing and refinement of the survey instrument, the reporting mechanisms, communication guidelines and action plan templates, and new policies and procedures for reports and reviews of programs, all of which remain subject to ongoing feedback and critique to ensure they remain useful. The draft survey and reporting structure were circulated to all stakeholders for final endorsement and eventual approval by Executive Committee.

Structural upgrade to systems was also required in order to support this new approach. A software system was sought that would support the complexity of the new feedback instrument, provide the students with a user-friendly experience, increase confidentiality, reduce turn-around time, and enable the depth of analysis required for meaningful and actionable reporting. A system from eXplorance (Canada) was able to deliver; hence has been implemented since mid-2010.

### *Quality Outcomes*

The comments from each course (approximately 28,000 per semester alone) are read and coded into themes by Planning, Quality and Reporting staff so that Course Coordinators and their supervisors can review the comments in an efficient manner and prepare action plans. The depth of knowledge gained through the new instrument was unprecedented at the university. Through the open-ended comments, students explain the importance of opportunities for work integrated learning, their preferences for different teaching methods and modes of delivery, the variability they encounter in teacher quality, their need for flexibility in their learning to accommodate their other responsibilities, and issues regarding curriculum and assessment.

Students are interested in the structure and design of their courses. The issues raised by students in their comments include design and delivery of the curriculum, relevance to a student's personal learning goals, the integration between lectures, tutorials, laboratories, and assessments, and the management and organisation of the course. Students are particularly interested in their teacher's organisation, commitment, approachability, helpfulness, willingness to provide feedback, and genuine concern for their learning. Assessment remains an area of concern for many students with perceptions of a lack of clarity in expectations, including the provision of performance criteria and insufficient levels of support and feedback. Students comment positively when assessments are embedded into learning, and when they are appropriately weighed, fairly marked, and promptly returned. Students express appreciation for a range of support for their learning, including learning resources, infrastructure resources, student administration and support services, as well as activities that promote a sense of social affinity and belonging.

### *Quality Improvement*

The focus on ownership of the process by all stakeholders was maintained through positive language in conversations and correspondence, and encouragement of and response to feedback. These collegial discussions about means and ends engaged "hearts and minds" (Yorke, 2000:24) and engendered what would become ongoing ownership.

The reports based on the new Student Feedback on Courses survey provide a valuable developmental resource for Program Conveners and Course Coordinators as well as those teaching and tutoring courses. Communication guidelines have been developed to assist Heads of School to act on the survey results and communicate findings and resultant actions to their staff and students. Where there are sensitive issues that need addressing, the guidelines suggest that Heads of School organise a discrete conversation with the appropriate staff first, before any course specific comments are distributed. This will enable the talking through of issues, in a calm and safe manner, and assess their validity or otherwise. Students are informed of survey results in a multiplicity of ways through the web, Blackboard, email, posters, in course outlines and sending summaries of actions to student representatives to give them the opportunity to feedback to the student groups and associations. The faculty, school and course level results are provided in graphical and tabular format with benchmarking information so that areas in need of attention can be easily identified.

### ***Case Study Two – The Stepping Out Project***

#### *Context*

In attempting to address the student experience at all points of the student journey into, through, and out of university (and to improve each stage), ongoing and varied approaches have been taken. During 2010, focus groups were conducted with final and penultimate year students, in addition to the online surveys, to canvas their views on their experience at university and what value they placed on their studies as they prepare for transition out of university. Almost one hundred students took part.

Rich data was collected and some priority areas were identified. One primary area was the requirement for an information resource, linking students to the services applicable and support available, when nearing completion of their studies. This links with findings from other feedback mechanisms, such as the university's internal Student Feedback on Programs and the national Course Experience Questionnaire. Additionally, it synchronizes with literature showing that this neglected aspect of the student experience involves significant change, uncertainty, and in some cases, a sense of loss (Perrone & Vickers 2003). Thus, intervention prior to graduation is critical to transition outcomes. Student feedback identified that there was some recognition that these services and support existed, but that it was often difficult and time consuming to find them, such as navigating the various and scattered web-pages that held potentially helpful information.

The Stepping Out project was developed in response to these issues. It is a web-based portal that contains a range of information and services available to students who are nearing completion, who have recently completed their program of study or who are thinking of returning to further study. The project addresses our student feedback, which contradicts the prevalent view that assumes the process of life after graduation is simply a matter of "matching skills required and skills possessed" (Holden and Hamblett, 2007:517). Instead, it provides a means to help empower students and graduates through easier access to relevant information.

#### *Approach and Process*

A consultative and collaborative approach was taken to establish the website with input and feedback from staff and students. This cross-unit cooperation, key to transformative change (Lomas 2004), created a sense of community among creator stakeholders, and reflected the intention and early indications of personal empowerment among the final year cohort. The methodology of the university-wide consultation was based on "the force of reason" rather than "the force of authority" (Harvey & Knight 1996: 177). In other words, the consultation process drew attention to knowledge gleaned both internally and from literature, which facilitated reflection and a willingness to improve current practice.

#### *Quality Outcomes*

The process also highlighted current initiatives that may have otherwise have remained siloed, and also stimulated innovative approaches to delivery of information and shared good practice. Once again, this

project was responsive to past student feedback and its development placed the student at the heart of quality. Feedback from students has been overwhelmingly positive:

“Great to have all the info together in ONE spot”

“It answers all the questions I was asking upon finishing my degree”

“... a much needed resource for students”

“I have saved the webpage into my favourites and plan on using it throughout the year”

It is clear in feedback about Stepping Out that such information is important in ensuring that students feel better prepared for life beyond their current program of study, and in maintaining their connection with the University. The website acts as a capstone and is facilitating better understanding by final year students of their generic skills as well as those that are discipline specific; encourages graduates to remain connected with the University, professional groups and the community; and fosters a commitment to life-long learning.

### *Quality Improvement*

The collegial approach to the development of Stepping Out has inculcated ownership of the site’s inherent purpose – enhancing the student experience, which is a strategic priority of the University. This ownership of the website’s purpose (and how this fits within the broader purpose and goals of the University) has seen it become an embedded component in an holistic approach to teaching and learning enhancement.

In addition, the success of Stepping Out has led to the provision of increased funding to further consolidate the website and undertake ongoing evaluation of its effectiveness.

### *Overall Qualitative Impacts of the University of Newcastle’s Quality Model*

While it is not uncommon for the operation of quality models to result in a dichotomy between the “predominant concerns of the teachers” and those of the quality agenda (Poole, 2010:14), this has not been the case at the University of Newcastle. Rather, the systemic approach to the key elements of our model (responsiveness, structural and cultural alignment, and collegiality) have resulted in many positive changes in attitudes and behaviours. Embedded in core processes are more frequent, strident and sophisticated conversations about learning and teaching quality across the University, including awareness that disengagement with quality issues is no longer a part of our culture.

### *Conclusion*

The University of Newcastle’s commitment to embedding a culture of quality has been illustrated by the redesign and implementation of the Student Feedback on Courses and the development of the Stepping Out website.

Both cases addressed student feedback and encompass principles identified as key to embedding a quality cultural change, particularly within higher education institutions. The University of Newcastle’s model is one of transformation, responsiveness and relies on alignment of the structural and cultural, and is driven by collegiality.

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## Workshops

### Using Engaging Leadership Framework Games and Artefacts

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#### *Practising Quality ‘Workshop Outline’*

##### *Introduction*

This workshop aligns with the ‘frameworks for quality’ sub-theme of the AuQF2011. The workshop is inspired by two ALTC projects which developed, trialed, refined, disseminated and applied the Engaging Leadership Framework (ELF) – a framework for leading change and improvement. The outcomes of the initial project are documented in Leading Excellence the report on the ‘Leadership for Implementing Improvements in the Learning and Teaching Quality Cycle’ project (LE6-13) <http://www.altc.edu.au/project-leadership-implementing-monash-2006>. The second project focused on the ‘Application of the Engaging Leadership Framework (ELF) to new higher education sites and contexts’ (LE9-1215). The outcomes are reported in 14 diverse cases studies undertaken at four institutions <http://www.altc.edu.au/resource-leading-excellence-monash-2010>.

Overwhelmingly, the case studies, reflections and feedback from the participants in the second-generation ALTC project reinforce the potential of the ELF to support positive change and to build leadership and management capacity for change, especially when it is linked to authentic situations and involves active learning. The ELF case studies also inspired the development of several artefacts and games designed to reinforce the ELF components and their application to different challenges and contexts.

This purpose of this workshop is to share the ELF artefacts and games with participants and to enable them to ‘play at’ and practice leadership and change management in a collaborative environment. The artefacts and games draw on the case studies and other learning and teaching issues in higher education. They build understanding and capacity incrementally and are aligned to developmental phases within the ‘A<sup>5</sup> Leadership and Professional Development Model’ which was developed during the course of the second ELF project.

##### *Background to Current Higher Education Policy Debates*

Post-secondary education in Australia is on the brink of substantial cultural, structural and regulatory change which will significantly impact on leaders of research, learning and teaching across all sectors. Tertiary education is emerging as the preferred term to describe the broad sector which encompasses higher education (universities), a variety of Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) including Technical and Further Education colleges and institutes (TAFEs) and numerous partner and private provider arrangements.

The imminent establishment of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA,) will significantly impact on leaders in all tertiary institutions. TEQSA will oversee and regulate the quality of tertiary education (university and non-university higher education providers) within both national and state and territory systems. Preliminary speculation suggests that TEQSA will drive a quality assurance

agenda framed by standards, measurement and performance indicators which will inform and shape government funding models. Undoubtedly, this policy will directly influence research, learning and teaching priorities, policy and practices across the tertiary sector.

### ***The Structure of the Workshop Proposal***

The challenge for all of us involved in tertiary education is, how can we best support and build leadership capacity in research, learning and teaching so that all students, regardless of which program they are undertaking, have access to quality, sustainable, inclusive and equitable learning experiences. This workshop provides one approach to building leadership in change management which draws heavily on play theory. The proposal is inspired and influenced by the following approach to change:

We envision...a future in which...leaders have used play practices to reform organizational policies and create organizations capable of producing innovative products and services.

National Institute for Play (2009)

Play theory and the importance of opportunities to play at (practice) leadership and change management are central to the approach to leadership and professional development embedded in this workshop. The use of a 'play-approach' as a mode of knowing, learning and development was influenced by recent work by Stuart Brown (2009) who heads up The National Institute for Play in the USA. The Institute talks about unlocking 'human potential through play'. The work undertaken in the second ELF project reinforced the value of learning through play as it provided opportunities for leaders to play at (practice) leading change. The decision to pursue this approach was also influenced by the earlier writings of Huizinga (1950) 'Homo Ludens a study of the play-element in culture', Dewey (1938) learning by doing, Piaget (1945) play as learning, Vygotsky (1978) – social constructivism, Bruner (1960) – learning through reflection, to mention just a few.

The proposed workshop will provide an opportunity for participants to work in small groups and 'to play' with several of the ELF games and artefacts. The session will be framed by the 'A<sup>5</sup> Leadership and Professional Development Model' so that participants can see how each of the artifacts and games contributes incrementally to capacity building in leadership and change management. Participants will also be exposed to the potential to adapt and modify the artefacts and games to local contexts and challenges. It is anticipated that by the end of the session participants will be able to develop their own games using the various templates. It should be possible to provide all participants with samples of the ELF artefacts and games at the session.

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## TEQSA and Regulation: A Blue Sky Approach

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### ***Introduction***

Congratulations! You have been appointed as the TEQSA Chief Commissioner. Along with your recently appointed fellow commissioners you have responsibility for steering and developing approaches to quality and regulation of higher education in Australia. The TEQSA legislation has passed through parliament and you have begun discussions with the various higher education stakeholder groups. A risk model is under development and a decision support system has been commissioned to support the activities of the new agency. Tapping on the wealth of expertise in the sector, you are beginning to formulate your ideas on what you might do to develop the higher education regulatory environment. How are you going to ensure the quality of higher education?

Within the boundaries of the TEQSA legislation, this workshop will explore notions of quality and regulation in higher education, and provide a forum for a creative and practical discussion on thinking about the future regulation of higher education. The workshop facilitators will provide the background information, painting an operating framework after which participants will be asked to join a stakeholder team. Each stakeholder team will be asked to explore and discuss creative approaches to regulation. Workshop participants will then come together and each stakeholder team will present the team's ideas on the "what" and the "how" of a future approach to regulation. The workshop facilitators will encourage a lively discussion which draws on the expertise, experiences and creative thinking within the stakeholder teams. The key 'take away' for workshop participants will be insights into the debates about the fundamentals of quality assurance and regulation, and the incorporation of risk into these frameworks. An understanding of these debates will help providers position their own systems and approaches in the national framework

### ***Workshop Outline***

This workshop will be highly interactive and all participants will be encouraged to have a voice in the discussions, thinking and debate about what you would do if you were a TEQSA Commissioner developing an approach to regulation. We all bring different experiences of regulation to the table, given a clean slate or a blue sky, how would you create the regulatory future!

A brief outline of the workshop follows:

Introduction
TEQSA operating background: setting the task for discussion
Participant discussions in stakeholder teams. e.g. Team NSAI, Team Dual Sector, Team University, Team Regulator
Each stakeholder team to present to workshop discussion on regulation, workshop participants will question and explore each team's proposals encouraging a lively discussion
Summing up and Workshop participants to vote on best and most creative ideas for future regulation of higher education

No preliminary reading is required, just a willingness to think creatively and to come along and provide your stakeholder insights on what the regulation of higher education could be! However, some familiarity with the proposed TEQSA approach could be helpful – cf: TEQSA Bill explanatory notes, draft Provider and Course Standards.

*Conference subtheme: This workshop aligns to the conference sub-theme of Frameworks for Quality*

## **Implementing the AQF Workshop Outline**

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### ***Outline***

The Australian Qualifications Framework is the national policy for regulated qualifications in all Australian education and training sectors. It incorporates the qualifications from each sector into a single comprehensive national qualifications framework.

The AQF was first introduced in 1995 to underpin the national system of qualifications in Australia. In 2011, the AQF was revised to ensure that qualifications outcomes remained relevant and nationally consistent, continued to support flexible qualifications linkages and pathways and enabled national and international portability and comparability of qualifications.

Implementation of the revised AQF for the higher education sector begins in January 2012 in line with the introduction of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). The AQF is the basis of the Qualification Standards within the Higher Education Standards Framework.

This workshop will give a brief outline of the AQF, the timeline for implementation and resources being developed by the AQF to support implementation, followed by a Q&A and semi-structured discussion about organisational (or individual) AQF implementation action plans.

## Implementing a Teaching Standards Framework

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### *Workshop Outline*

The introduction of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) will require a more structured approach to demonstrating the quality of the teaching provided by the Australian Higher Education sector. With funding provided to the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) the Teaching Standards Framework (TSF) project was initiated to facilitate the development of teaching standards from within the Australian higher education sector.

A key aim of a standards framework is to identify the relationship between institutional structures and practices and improving learning outcomes (Baird & Gordon, 2009; Gibbs, 2010; Scott, 2008). The aim of the national TSF project was to develop from within the higher education sector a framework that institutions could use to evaluate their own teaching performance in relation to the goals and priorities they set for themselves (ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, 2003; Hodgson & Whalley, 2007; Scott, 2008; Westerheijden, Hulpiau & Waeytens, 2007).

The outcome of the project was the development of six standards and a revised framework:

### *Teaching Standards*

- Standard 1      The institution's teaching structures ensure quality learning outcomes.
- Standard 2      The institution's teaching practices ensure a quality student learning experience.

### *Learning Environment Standards*

- Standard 3      The institution's services and resources enable quality learning outcomes.
- Standard 4      The institution's services and resources enable a quality student learning experience.

### *Curriculum Standards*

- Standard 5      The institution ensures that the curriculum is current, academically robust and rigorous.
- Standard 6      The institution ensures that curriculum content and assessment practices produce quality learning outcomes.

The TSF is structured around three themes – teaching, learning environment, curriculum. Within each theme are seven focus areas – Management Responsibilities, Planning, Resources, Policies and Procedures, Practices, Outcomes, Monitoring and Evaluation. Each of these are broken down into criteria (statements of principles) and performance indicators (actions to be undertaken) against which and assessment may be made. The TSF can be used to assess performance across an entire institution or it can be modified and adapted for use in smaller organisational units (e.g. departments, faculties, schools). In this way, the TSF provides the possibility for a range of internal and external benchmarking opportunities. With institutions able to indicate areas of excellence, the TSF will facilitate the development of benchmarks towards which other institutions can aspire. This will allow the sharing of good practice and provide opportunities to learn from both within an institution and across the sector more broadly. The

purpose of a TSF has always been to meet the twin aims of quality assurance (QA) and quality enhancement (QE). In this way it provides an external focus for compliance purposes and an internal focus for development.

### **Workshop Objectives**

This interactive workshop will require participants to develop a strategy for the implementation of the TSF at their institution. Participants will be divided into small groups, each tackling one theme – teaching, learning environment, curriculum. They will be required to develop an implementation plan together with suggestions for how they would use their subsequent assessments for QA and QE purposes. A plenary will provide the opportunity to identify the different implementation strategies developed and QA and QE suggestions. The Framework will be provided to participants at the workshop, although it is strongly recommended that all participants access the Framework in advance of attending the session.

### **Background**

Macquarie University had developed teaching standards frameworks at both the institutional and individual level for its own internal auditing purposes in 2009. The role of the standards frameworks was to provide criteria that could be used to assess institutional and individual performance data in a way that contributed to the continual improvement of learning and teaching. In early 2010, Macquarie proposed that the frameworks be tested as a possible tool for assessing teaching quality across the Australian university sector. All Australian universities were invited to participate, 17 submitted an expression of interest with nine universities involved in testing and re-designing the framework between August and December 2010, two at their own expense. Each institution undertook the project in a spirit of collaboration with the benefit of the sector in mind. Their willingness to review their own practices thoroughly and transparently, and report on their findings enriched the outcome of the project.

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## Good Practice in Risk Management for NSA-HEPs

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### Workshop Outline

#### Introduction

Risk Management is an essential part of good institutional governance. Institutional governance as a whole was identified as the most significant area for improvement in a review of the first 20 audit reports published for the sector (Winchester, 2010). The management of risk is a key role for the Board of Directors, and is often managed by a sub-committee of the Board, such as an Audit and Risk Committee.

#### Activities

This workshop outlines definitions of risk including common-use definitions; academic risk as defined by AUQA (2010); and the AS/NZS ISO 3100:2009 Standard which is the widely accepted definition in international business and the professions. Participants will consider the appropriateness of these definitions to their own organisations through group discussion.

The roles of Board members are considered in relation to the responsibilities of the Board, using Robert Tricker's (2008) Framework for Corporate Governance (Figure 1). Participants will discuss and evaluate the various types of risk as experienced by their own organisations.

Compliance risk e.g.	Focus	Compliance	Performance	Strategic risk e.g.
National Protocols, ESOS/CRICOS, Trade Practices Act, OHSW	External	Provide Accountability	Strategy Formulation	Partnerships, market position
Academic risk e.g.	Internal	Monitoring and Supervising	Policy making	Management risk e.g.
Program, student and graduate quality	Orientation	Past and present orientation	Future orientation	Delegations and accountabilities, HR

Practical activities of the workshop will be the estimation of risk in terms of likelihood versus impact, and the calculation of residual risk using an example from a Higher Education Institution supplemented by examples from the participants' own experience. Participants will also work through a sample approach for developing and monitoring a risk register.

Adopting the position that NSA-HEP organisations are increasingly engaged in research and scholarship and creative activity, the workshop also introduces the NHMRC guidelines relating to ethics. These are particularly valuable in discussion of gauging, minimising and managing risk (National Health and

Medical Research Council, 2007, pp. 16–18) and the role and responsibilities of the institution (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007, pp. 77–78).

Participants will bring their own experiences of risk to the practical activities.

### ***Learning Outcomes***

At the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- Define various types of risk
- Estimate residual risk
- Begin to develop a risk register.

### ***References***

Australian/New Zealand Standard ISO 3100:2009 “Risk management – Principles and guidelines”.

*AUQA Audit Manual* (2010) Version 7, Appendix D.

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